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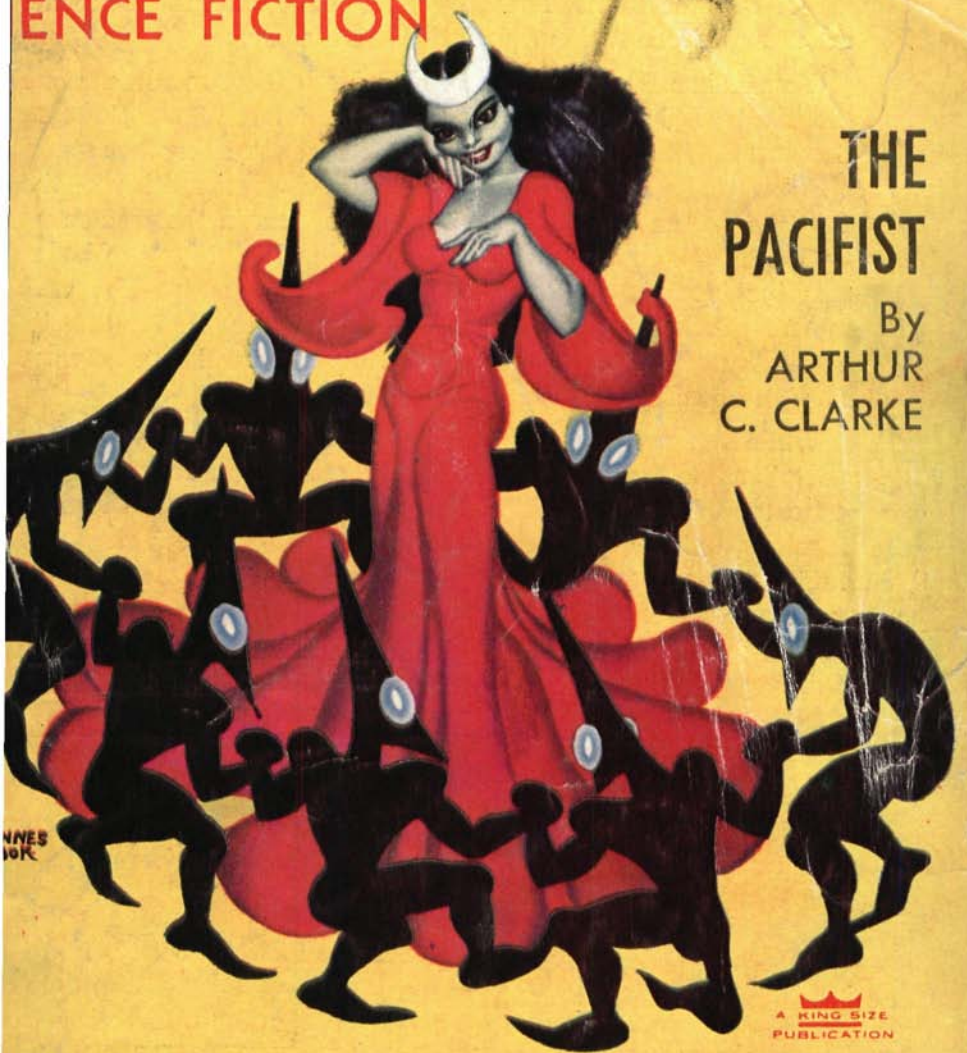

THE PACIFIST
By ARTHUR C. CLARKE

A KING SIZE PUBLICATION

standing Fantasy and Science-Fiction by ISAAC ASIMOV
LLIAM TENN • ROBERT BLOCH • RAYMOND F. JONES

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THE 14TH WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION . . .

TWENTY YEARS AGO seven Science Fiction enthusiasts from New York visited Philadelphia one Sunday afternoon, meeting together with local fans. That gathering of the two groups became the first "science fiction convention" in history.

This Labor Day weekend, in New York City, more than one thousand people will attend the four-day 14TH WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION at the Biltmore Hotel, attending the several sessions to be addressed by distinguished personalities in the field, joining in the after-sessions parties and in the traditional Costume Ball, and applauding guest of honor Arthur C. Clarke, principal speaker at the Banquet on Sunday night. The next morning, Labor Day, Convention members will vote for the site of next year's convention, the choice this year being between London and Los Angeles.

While many of you will perhaps be more attracted by the "big party" nature of the gathering, the convention represents an opportunity for hundreds of "professionals" in the field to meet together, to talk "shop" and to renew friendships, *and* an opportunity for fans and interested readers to meet the men and the women who personify Science Fiction and Fantasy. Prominent among these will be John W. Campbell, Jr., Willy Ley, Anthony Boucher, Judith Merril, Murray Leinster, Isaac Asimov, Theodore Sturgeon, William Tenn, L. Sprague de Camp, Lester Del Rey, H. Beam Piper, and many others.

Join us at the Biltmore Hotel that weekend (the registration fee is $2, incidentally) and meet and hear the men and the women who have explored our Todays and our Tomorrows!

DAVID KYLE, Chairman,
World Science Fiction Society, Inc.

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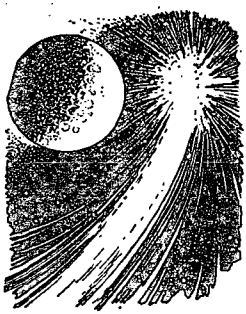

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the pacifist

by . . . Arthur C. Clarke

FVO

What dreadful things can happen when a Dr. Milquetoast gets that gleam in his eye. . . .

I GOT TO the "White Hart" late that evening, and when I arrived everyone was crowded into the corner under the dartboard. All except Drew, that is: he had not deserted his post, but was sitting behind the bar reading the collected T. S. Eliot. He broke off from "The Confidential Clerk" long enough to hand me a beer and to tell me what was going on.

"Eric's brought in some kind of games machine—it's beaten everybody so far. Sam's trying his luck with it now."

At that moment a roar of laughter announced that Sam had been no luckier than the rest, and I pushed my way through the crowd to see what was happening.

On the table lay a flat metal box the size of a checker-board, and divided into squares in a similar way. At the corner of each square was a two-way switch and a little neon lamp: the whole affair was plugged into the light socket (thus plunging the dartboard into darkness) and Eric

Arthur C. Clarke, past Chairman of the British Interplanetary Society and author of classics such as THE EXPLORATION OF SPACE, THE SANDS OF MARS, REACH FOR TOMORROW, EARTHLIGHT, *and others, is to be in New York this Labor Day Weekend as Guest of Honor at the 14th World Science Fiction Convention. Mr. Clarke returns to these pages with one of his inimitable "White Hart" stories, the truth about what happened when computer Karl von Clausewitz ran into the General who'd led a much too sheltered existence.*

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Rodgers was looking round for a new victim.

"What does the thing do?" I asked.

"It's a modification of naughts and crosses—what the Americans call Tic-Tac-Toe. Shannon showed it to me when I was over at Bell Labs. What you have to do is to complete a path from one side of the board to the other—call it North to South—by turning these switches. Imagine the thing forms a grid of streets, if you like, and these neons are the traffic lights. You and the machine take turns making moves. The machine tries to block your path by building one of its own in the East-West direction—the little neons light up to tell you which way it wants to make a move. Neither track need be a straight line: you can zig-zag as much as you like. All that matters is that the path must be continuous, and the one to get across the board first wins."

"Meaning the machine, I suppose?"

"Well, it's never been beaten yet."

"Can't you force a draw, by blocking the machine's path so that at least you don't lose?"

"That's what we're trying; like to have a go?"

Two minutes later I joined the other unsuccessful contestants. The machine had dodged all my barriers and established its own track from East to West. I wasn't convinced that it was unbeatable, but the game was clearly a good deal more complicated than it looked.

Eric glanced round his audience when I had retired. No one else seemed in a hurry to move forward.

"Ha!" he said. "The very man. What about you, Purvis? You've not had a shot yet."

Harry Purvis was standing at the back of the crowd, with a far-off look in his eye. He jolted back to earth as Eric addressed him, but didn't answer the question directly.

"Fascinating things, these electronic computers," he mused. "I suppose I shouldn't tell you this, but your gadget reminds me of what happened to Project Clausewitz. A curious story, and one very expensive to the American taxpayer."

"Look," said John Wyndham anxiously. "Before you start, be a good sport and let us get our glasses filled. Draw!"

This important matter having been attended to, we gathered round Harry. Only Charlie Willis still remained with the machine, hopefully trying his luck.

"As you all know," began Harry, "Science with a capital S is a big thing in the military world these days. The weapons side—rockets, atom bombs and so on—is only part of it, though that's all the public knows about. Much more fascinating, in my opinion, is the operational research angle. You might say that's concerned with brains rather than brute force.

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I once heard it defined as how to win wars without actually fighting, and that's not a bad description.

"Now you all know about the big electronic computers that cropped up like mushrooms in the 1950's. Most of them were built to deal with mathematical problems, but when you think about it you'll realize that War itself is a mathematical problem. It's such a complicated one that human brains can't handle it—there are far too many variables. Even the greatest strategist cannot see the picture as a whole: the Hitlers and Napoleons always make a mistake in the end.

"But a machine—that would be a different matter. A number of bright people realized this after the end of the war. The techniques that had been worked out in the building of ENIAC and the other big computers could revolutionize strategy.

"Hence Project Clausewitz. Don't ask me how I got to know about it, or press me for too many details. All that matters is that a good many megabucks worth of electronic equipment, and some of the best scientific brains in the United States, went into a certain cavern in the Kentucky Hills. They're still there, but things haven't turned out exactly as they expected.

"Now I don't know what experience you have of high-ranking military officers, but there's one type you've all come across in fiction. That's the pompous, conservative, stick-in-the-mud careerist who's got to the top by sheer pressure from beneath, who does everything by rules and regulations and regards civilians as, at the best, unfriendly neutrals. I'll let you into a secret: he actually exists. He's not very common nowadays, but he's still around and sometimes it's not possible to find a safe job for him. When that happens, he's worth his weight in plutonium to the Other Side.

"Such a character, it seems, was General Smith. No, of *course* that wasn't his real name! His father was a Senator, and although lots of people in the Pentagon had tried hard enough, the old man's influence had prevented the General from being put in charge of something harmless, like the coast defense of Wyoming. Instead, by miraculous misfortune, he had been made the officer responsible for Project Clausewitz.

"Of course, he was only concerned with the administrative, not the scientific, aspects of the work. All might yet have been well had the General been content to let the scientists get on with their work while he concentrated on saluting smartness, the coefficient of reflection of barrack floors, and similar matters of military importance. Unfortunately, he didn't.

"The General had led a sheltered existence. He had, if I may borrow from Wilde (everybody else does) been a man of peace,

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except in his domestic life. He had never met scientists before, and the shock was considerable. So perhaps it is not fair to blame him for everything that happened.

"It was a considerable time before he realized the aims and objects of Project Clausewitz, and when he did he was quite disturbed. This may have made him feel even less friendly towards his scientific staff, for despite anything I may have said the General was not entirely a fool. He was intelligent enough to understand that, if the Project succeeded, there might be more ex-generals around than even the combined boards of management of American industry could comfortably absorb.

"But let's leave the General for a minute and have a look at the scientists. There were about fifty of them, as well as a couple of hundred technicians. They'd all been carefully screened by the F.B.I., so probably not more than one or two were active members of the Communist Party. Though there was a lot of talk of sabotage later, for once in a while the comrades were completely innocent. Besides, what happened certainly wasn't sabotage in any generally accepted meaning of the word . . .

"The man who had really designed the computer was a quiet little mathematical genius who had been swept out of college into the Kentucky hills and the world of Security and Priorities before he'd really realized what had happened. He wasn't called Dr. Milquetoast, but he should have been and that's what I'll christen him.

"To complete our cast of characters, I'd better say something about Karl. At this stage in the business, Karl was only half-built. Like all big computers, most of him consisted of vast banks of memory units which could receive and store information until it was needed. The creative part of Karl's brain—the analyzers and integrators—took this information and operated on it, to produce answers to the questions he was asked. Given all the relevant facts, Karl would produce the right answers. The problem, of course, was to see that Karl *did* have all the facts—he couldn't be expected to get the right results from inaccurate or insufficient information.

"It was Dr. Milquetoast's responsibility to design Karl's brain. Yes, I know that's a crudely anthropomorphic way of looking at it, but no one can deny that these big computers have personalities. It's hard to put it more accurately without getting technical, so I'll simply say that little Milquetoast had to create the extremely complex circuits that enabled Karl to think in the way he was supposed to do.

"So here are our three protagonists—General Smith, pining for the days of Custer; Dr. Milquetoast, lost in the fascinating scientific intricasies of his job; and Karl,

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fifty tons of electronic gear, not yet animated by the currents that would soon be coursing through him.

"Soon—but not soon enough for General Smith. Let's not be too hard on the General: someone had probably put the pressure on him, when it became obvious that the Project was falling behind schedule. He called Dr. Milquetoast into his office.

"The interview lasted more than thirty minutes, and the doctor said less than thirty words. Most of the time the General was making pointed remarks about production times, deadlines and bottlenecks. He seemed to be under the impression that building Karl differed in no important particular from the assembly of the current model Ford: it was just a question of putting the bits together. Dr. Milquetoast was not the sort of man to explain the error, even if the General had given him the opportunity. He left, smarting under a considerable sense of injustice.

"A week later, it was obvious that the creation of Karl was falling still further behind schedule. Milquetoast was doing his best, and there was no one who could do better. Problems of a complexity totally beyond the General's comprehension had to be met and mastered. They *were* mastered, but it took time, and time was in short supply.

"At his first interview, the General had tried to be as nice as he could, and had succeeded in being merely rude. This time, he tried to be rude, with results that I leave to your imagination. He practically insinuated that Milquetoast and his colleagues, by falling behind their deadlines, were guilty of un-American inactivity.

"From this moment onwards, two things started to happen. Relations between the Army and the scientists grew steadily worse; and Dr. Milquetoast, for the first time, began to give serious thought to the wider implications of his work. He had always been too busy, too engaged upon the immediate problems of his task, to consider his social responsibilities. He was still too busy now, but that didn't stop him pausing for reflection. "Here am I," he told himself, "one of the best pure mathematicians in the world—and what am I doing? What's happened to my thesis on Diophantine equations? When am I going to have another smack at the prime number theorem? In short, when am I going to do some *real* work again?"

"He could have resigned, but that didn't occur to him. In any case, far down beneath that mild and diffident exterior was a stubborn streak. Dr. Milquetoast continued to work, even more energetically than before. The construction of Karl proceeded slowly but steadily: the final connexions in his myriad-celled brain were soldered: the thousands of

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circuits were checked and tested by the mechanics.

"And one circuit, indistinguishably interwoven among its multitude of companions, leading to a set of memory cells apparently identical with all the others, was tested by Dr. Milquetoast alone, for no one else knew that it existed.

"The great day came. To Kentucky, by devious routes, came very important personages. A whole constellation of multi-starred generals arrived from the Pentagon. Even the Navy had been invited.

"Proudly, General Smith led the visitors from cavern to cavern, from memory banks to selector networks to matrix analyzers to input tables—and finally to the rows of electric typewriters on which Karl would print the results of his deliberations. The General knew his way around quite well: at least, he got most of the names right. He even managed to give the impression, to those who knew no better, that he was largely responsible for Karl.

" 'Now,' said the General cheerfully. 'Let's give him some work to do. Anyone like to set him a few sums?'

"At the word 'sums' the mathematicians winced, but the General was unaware of his *faux pas*. The assembled brass thought for a while: then someone said daringly, 'What's 9 multiplied by itself twenty times?'

"One of the technicians, with an audible sniff, punched a few keys. There was a rattle of gunfire from an electric typewriter, and before anyone could blink twice the answer had appeared—all twenty digits of it."

(*I've looked it up since:* for anyone who wants to know it's:—

12157665459056928801

But let's get back to Harry and his tale.)

"For the next fifteen minutes Karl was bombarded with similar trivialities. The visitors were impressed, though there was no reason to suppose that they'd have spotted it if all the answers had been completely wrong.

"The General gave a modest cough. Simple arithmetic was as far as he could go, and Karl had barely begun to warm up. 'I'll now hand you over,' he said, 'to Captain Winkler.'

"Captain Winkler was an intense young Harvard graduate whom the General distrusted, rightly suspecting him to be more a scientist than a military man. But he was the only officer who really understood what Karl was supposed to do, or could explain exactly how he set about doing it. He looked, the General thought grumpily, like a damned schoolmaster as he started to lecture the visitors.

"The tactical problem that had been set up was a complicated one, but the answer was already known to everybody except Karl. It was a battle that had been fought and

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finished almost a century before, and when Captain Winkler concluded his introduction, a general from Boston whispered to his aide, 'I'll bet some damn Southerner has fixed it so that Lee wins this time.' Everyone had to admit, however, that the problem was an excellent way of testing Karl's capabilities.

"The punched tapes disappeared into the capacious memory units: patterns of lights flickered and flashed across the registers; mysterious things happened in all directions.

" 'This problem,' said Captain Winkler primly, 'will take about five minutes to evaluate.'

"As if in deliberate contradiction, one of the typewriters promptly started to chatter. A strip of paper shot out of the feed, and Captain Winkler, looking rather puzzled at Karl's unexpected alacrity, read the message. His lower jaw immediately dropped six inches, and he stood staring at the paper as if unable to believe his eyes.

" 'What is it, man?' barked the General.

"Captain Winkler swallowed hard, but appeared to have lost the power of speech. With a snort of impatience, the General snatched the paper from him. Then it was his turn to stand paralyzed, but unlike his subordinate he also turned a most beautiful red. For a moment he looked like some tropical fish strangling out of water: then, not without a slight scuffle, the enigmatic message was captured by the five-star general who outranked everybody in the room.

"His reaction was totally different. He promptly doubled up with laughter.

"The minor officers were left in a state of infuriating suspense for quite ten minutes. But finally the news filtered down through colonels to captains to lieutenants, until at last there wasn't a G.I. in the establishment who did not know the wonderful news.

"Karl had told General Smith that he was a pompous baboon. That was all.

"Even though everybody agreed with Karl, the matter could hardly be allowed to rest there. Something, obviously, had gone wrong. Something—or someone—had diverted Karl's attention from the Battle of Gettysburg.

" 'Where,' roared General Smith, finally recovering his voice, 'is Dr. Milquetoast?'

"He was no longer present. He had slipped quietly out of the room, having witnessed his great moment. Retribution would come later, of course, but it was worth it.

"The frantic technicians cleared the circuits and started running tests. They gave Karl an elaborate series of multiplications and divisions to perform—the computer's equivalent of 'The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.' Everything seemed to be functioning perfectly. So they put in a very

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simple tactical problem, which a Lieutenant J.G. could solve in his sleep.

"Said Karl: 'Go jump in a lake, General.'

"It was then that General Smith realized that he was confronted with something outside the scope of Standard Operating Procedure. He was faced with mechanical mutiny, no less.

"It took several hours of tests to discover exactly what had happened. Somewhere tucked away in Karl's capacious memory units was a superb collection of insults, lovingly assembled by Dr. Milquetoast. He had punched on tape, or recorded in patterns of electrical impulses, everything he would like to have said to the General himself. But that was not all he had done: that would have been too easy, not worthy of his genius. He had also installed what could only be called a censor circuit—he had given Karl the power of discrimination. Before solving it, Karl examined every problem fed to him. If it was concerned with pure mathematics, he co-operated and dealt with it properly. But if it was a military problem—out came one of the insults. After twenty times, he had not repeated himself once, and the WACs had already had to be sent out of the room.

"It must be confessed that after a while the technicians were almost as interested in discovering what indignity Karl would next heap upon General Smith as they were in finding the fault in the circuits—the electronic nigger, as it were, in the mechanical woodpile. He had begun with mere insults and surprising geneological surmises, but had swiftly passed on to detailed instructions the mildest of which would have been highly prejudicial to the General's dignity, while the more imaginative would have seriously imperilled his physical integrity. The fact that all these messages, as they emerged from the typewriters, were immediately classified TOP SECRET was small consolation to the recipient. He knew with a glum certainty that this would be the worst-kept secret of the cold war, and that it was time he looked round for a civilian occupation.

"And there, gentlemen," concluded Purvis, "the situation remains. The engineers are still trying to unravel the circuits that Dr. Milquetoast installed, and no doubt it's only a matter of time before they succeed. But meanwhile Karl remains an unyielding pacifist. He's perfectly happy playing with the theory of numbers, computing tables of powers, and handling arithmetical problems generally. Do you remember the famous toast 'Here's to pure mathematics—may it never be of any use to anybody'? Karl would have seconded that. . . .

"As soon as anyone attempts to slip a fast one across him, he goes on strike. And because he's got such a wonderful memory, he can't

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be fooled. He has half the great battles of the world stored up in his circuits, and can recognize at once any variations on them. Though attempts were made to disguise tactical exercises as problems in mathematics, he could spot the subterfuge right away. And out would come another *billet doux* for the General.

"As for Dr. Milquetoast, no one could do much about him because he promptly had a nervous breakdown. It was suspiciously well timed; but he could certainly claim to have earned it. When last heard of he was teaching matrix algebra at a theological college in Denver. He swears he's forgotten everything that had ever happened while he was working on Karl. Maybe he was even telling the truth . . ."

There was a sudden shout from the back of the room.

"I've won!" cried Charles Willis. "Come and see!"

We all crowded under the dartboard. It seemed true enough. Charlie had established a zig-zag but continuous track from one side of the checker-board to the other, despite the obstacles the machine had tried to put in his way.

"Show us how you did it," said Eric Rodgers.

Charlie looked embarrassed.

"I've forgotten," he said. "I didn't make a note of all the moves."

A sarcastic voice broke in from the background.

"But *I* did," said John Christopher. "You were cheating—you made two moves at once."

After that, I am sorry to say, there was some disorder, and Drew had to threaten violence before peace was restored. I don't know who really won the squabble, and I don't think it matters. For I'm inclined to agree with what Purvis remarked as he picked up the robot checker-board and examined its wiring.

"You see," he said, "this little gadget is only a simple-minded cousin of Karl's—and look what it's done already. All these machines are beginning to make us look like fools. Before long they'll start to disobey us without any Milquetoast interfering with their circuits. And then they'll start ordering us about—they're logical, after all."

He sighed. "When that happens, there won't be a thing that we can do about it. We'll just have to say to the dinosaurs: 'Move over a bit—here comes *homo sap!*' And the vacuum tube shall inherit the earth."

There was no time for further pessimistic philosophy, for the door opened and Police Constable Wilkins stuck his head in. "Where's the owner of CGC 571?" he asked testily. "Oh—it's *you*, Mr. Purvis. Your rear light's out."

Harry looked at me sadly, then shrugged his shoulders in resignation. "You see," he said, "it's started already." And he went out into the night.

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a way of life

by . . . Robert Bloch

FWD

Twirling the top of his propeller beanie nervously, the next President. . . .

TWIRLING the top of his propellor beanie nervously, the next President of the United States peered through the curtain at Convention Hall.

"Now?" he murmured.

The girl beside him shook her head. "Not yet. Let them get the demonstration out of their systems." She smiled. "Are you happy, John?"

John Henderson nodded. "Yes, but scared, too."

"Don't forget, you're the next President," the girl reminded him.

"*If* I'm elected." Henderson grinned. "This was only the nomination, remember? And that NFFF crowd is tough."

"FAPA will win, though." Avis Drake squeezed his arm reassuringly. "How did you like Daddy's nominating speech?"

"Terrific. It really did the trick."

"Yes, didn't it? Listen to that demonstration."

Together they stared through the aperture in the curtain and watched the conventioneers parade through the hall.

Somewhere in the background

Robert Bloch, who needs no introduction in these pages, takes us to a future where men recall, tears in their eyes, the glorious story of fandom's early martyrs. John Henderson, next President of the United States, an authority who hands down pronouncements on the meaning of the scientific scriptures, makes a shocking discovery that threatens to change his world.

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the organ was playing a wild medley—everything from the religious *Kyrie Ellison* to the old traditional FAPA drinking-song, *Yes, Sir, That's My Burbee*. But it was impossible to hear the melodies plainly, for the fans were on the march, spilling down the aisles of Gernsback Hall and shouting Henderson's name. They were tossing their beanies, spraying one another with zap-guns, waving copies of their state magazines. All of the delegations joined the demonstrations, clustering around the banners borne aloft by standard-bearers from every club in the land.

John Henderson peered at the legends. Here was the contingent from Silverbergh, there the flag of the Swamp Critters, and in the back of the hall rose the snowy emblem of a small group from the faraway North Pohl. Interspersed with the HENDERSON FOR PRESIDENT signs swirled other printed declarations—GRENNELL WAS A GOOD MAN BUT HENDERSON IS BETTER, and WHERE THERE'S A WILLIS THERE'S A WAY, and because there's always a joker in the crowd some place, BHEER IS THE ONLY TRUE GHOD!

But now Avis's father, Lionel Drake, had mounted the rostrum once more and was pounding for order, his gavel giving forth a rising rhythm.

Gradually the Big Name Fans found their seats. Lionel Drake was holding the microphone, uttering the short introduction.

"Ready?" Avis whispered.

John Henderson nodded. The girl put her arms around his neck and kissed his cheek. "Go out there and pour it on," she murmured.

He heard Lionel Drake speak his name, heard the roar of the crowd, then stepped through the aperture of the curtains and faced the convention.

They cheered him, and when the cheers subsided he began to speak. There was a mimeographed copy of his talk on the lectern in front of him, but John Henderson found himself ignoring it.

He talked slowly, at first, eying the faces in the crowd. They were so young, so absurdly young! Many of them seemed scarcely out of their teens, and less than a third were in their thirties. Out of the entire assemblage there couldn't have been a dozen old people: Lionel Drake's gray head was singularly conspicuous. But then, Lionel Drake was one of the rare exceptions, one of the rare survivors. Why, he'd been alive in Ellison's day, in the actual time of Rog Phillips and Dave Kyle and Ackerman! Of course, he'd just been a baby and he'd never seen them, but he'd been alive. And so had hundreds of millions of others. What made old Lionel Drake so unusual was the fact that he'd stayed alive when the hundreds of millions perished. Lionel Drake

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had survived, and as a survivor he was one of the few remaining actual links with the distant past.

John Henderson found himself talking about that distant past now: speaking not from his prepared message, not from his head, but from his heart.

"You want to know my plans, my program," he was saying. "But the statement of my platform will have to wait. Today I have one thing, and only one thing to say to you. In the immortal words of the sainted Tucker—*Fandom Is a Way of Life.*"

He paused until the cheering subsided.

"Strange, isn't it, how that phrase has survived in a shattered century? Incredible as it may seem to us here today, it was first uttered less than a hundred years ago. We do not know the circumstances which gave it birth. We do not even know too much concerning its creator. The man that was Wilson Tucker, or Arthur Tucker, or Bob Tucker is today merely a legend; we know less of the actual facts of his existence than we do of Shakespeare, or H. G. Wells, or Aldous Julian Huxley and the other great fantasy and science writers of the more remote past.

"But the words survive. They survived in the old days, before fandom rose to bring light into the darkness of men's minds. When our ancestors—yours and mine—were a humble and persecuted minority—those words gave them strength. Strength to endure the jibes and the ridicule of the uneducated masses; the television-worshippers, the sports-lovers, the Cadillac-minded who ruled the world.

"You all know the story, of course; the story of fandom's early martyrs, gathering secretly in little bands to form the first fan-clubs and hold the first conventions. They had no power then, no recognition. They were jeered at and despised, mocked as wild-eyed visionaries and fanatics. And yet they persevered. They toiled over their crude mimeographs, turning out their magazines. Those magazines have long since crumbled into dust, but who amongst us can ever forget the names? *Grue* and *Hyphen: Amazing* and *Astounding: Galaxy* and *Quandry* and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. Fantastic Universe, Startling, Confidential, Infinity, Dimensions*—these names will never die!

"Nor will the names of their creators. And yet, they were not famous then. There was a John W. Campbell, yes, but no Campbellites to follow him. There was an Aitchell Gold, but no Aitchellians. And when St. Anthony Boucher was writing, or painting those marvelous works under the pseudonym of Francois Boucher, canonization was far-distant from his thoughts. Why, then, did these men continue in the great work? I like to believe it was because all of them followed a single inspira-

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tion, the inspiration found in that great motto of theirs and ours—*Fandom Is a Way of Life.*

"Surely that motto must have inspired the great fan scientists of that era: men like Asimov, E. E. Smith, Arthur C. Clarke, Dr. Barrett and Willy Ley. The immortal Heinlein, or Einstein must have known it when he created Heinlein's Theory of Relativity which resulted in the development of thermonuclear weapons.

"And yet, at the time, the masses laughed. Today we know that all science, all invention, sprang directly from the work of these men. We still have their hardcover books attesting to their knowledge of nuclear fission, rocketry, radar and all the other marvels of the First Age of Fandom.

"But the power they possessed fell into evil hands. The bombs fell and the intercontinental missiles landed. And from Moscow—which we know today as Moskowitz—came the war that ended the First Age of Fandom and almost ended the existence of all fankind.

"We are well aware, all of us, of the black years that followed. The years when men of good will—the few who survived—went underground. The years of plague and radiation and ceaseless surface warfare; the years of almost total disintegration and destruction. Fankind's political structure, religious structure, social and economic structure vanished. Even the military structure could not long endure. And what was left? Only the faith of fandom. When they burned the universities, burned the libraries, burned the books—what remained? The treasured possessions of a handful of surviving fans. In the burrows beneath the ruins of cities; in rural fastnesses like buried Bloomington and faraway Weyauwega, the few existing mimeographs continued to turn.

"When survivors sought the surface of the world again, when the few millions left out of hundreds of millions walked the face of the earth once more, many found a fate worse than their fellows. They looked upon the shambles of civilization and went mad. There were those who turned upon their fellows and sought to enforce their rule through force. They warred upon one another and perished. There were those who tried vainly to re-establish the old order, but in vain. Fankind had lost faith in industrial science, in military science, in so-called political government and the religious creeds that sanctioned the horror of war.

"And it was then, we know, that Fandom came into its own at last. Fandom International — founded on friendship, on mutual knowledge and mutual faith in true brotherhood and true scientific knowledge. Fans did not go mad. Fans did not resort to force. Fans were prepared for a new order, and a new day. Why? Because even through the time of darkness and

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destruction they clung to their motto—*Fandom Is a Way of Life.*

"It was Fandom, then, that rose to leadership. The children of the First Fans received the carefully-guarded knowledge of the past. They rallied to the organizations known as FAPA and—yes—the NFFF."

At the mention of the rival party's name, the crowd booed. John Henderson raised his hand for silence.

"Do not allow sentiment to overthrow reason," he cautioned. "We of the FAPA—the Fantasy Amateur Press Association—know that the NFFF is a deluded minority. The so-called National Fantasy Fan Foundation will never win a national or international election."

The crowd applauded, but Henderson overrode them. "Still, the NFFF are Fans. Fake-Fans, perhaps, but still Fans. They too believe that *Fandom Is a Way of Life.*"

He paused, clearing his throat. "Remember, we once worked together, all of us. Our fathers helped to rebuild the cities, helped to restore reason. Using the scientific knowledge and the wisdom preserved in the science-fiction books, they brought order out of chaos. It was the application of Fannish principles that rebuilt the world. In the past thirty years we have gone far. Our world is still woefully underpopulated. Great cities, entire nations, are yet in ruins. But we make progress. Under the guidance and leadership of our local Fan Clubs, under the supervision of Big Name Fans like yourselves, we are reshaping fankind.

"First Fandom's dream of reaching the stars is still a dream. But once again the jet planes are beginning to soar—the great silver Heinliners streak across our skies. Once more we are building factories and laboratories; training our future leaders at Fredric Brown University, peering up at the planets from the Mount Richard Wilson Observatory, creating new developments like the Bradbury Ray.

"There will be no more war. Fandom has seen to that. Now that all of us are united as True, Serious Constructive Fans, our racial and political differences will never matter. Nor will religion divide us. For whether we choose to worship Ghu or Foofoo, whether we exalt the Poo or the Yobber, we unite in one belief. And it is this belief I intend to carry forward; it is this belief which will become the keynote of the coming campaign. *Fandom Is a Way of Life!*"

John Henderson bowed his head and stepped behind the curtains, not waiting to acknowledge the roaring applause from the crowd below.

He faced Avis Drake and her father with a wry grin. "Well, that's that," he sighed. "Now—what about that little vacation you promised me?"

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The farmhouse stood just outside what had once been the city of Reading, in Pennsylvania. It was Lionel Drake's own private headquarters, and here John Henderson found the weeks of rest he needed before embarking on the presidential campaign.

There was work to do, of course: the Big Name Fan delegations from every state came to lay out their plans and to pledge Henderson's attendance at their rallies—the Midwestcon, the Oklacon, the Westercon and all the rest. And in the evenings, Henderson plotted strategy with old Lionel Drake.

But there were long golden afternoons spent wandering with Avis hand in hand over the enchanted countryside. For this was Pennsylvania, and magic ground—the land of Harry Warner, of Bill Danner and Madle and Rothman and many another legendary figure from the distant past. The ghosts of Damon Knight and Judith Merril hovered in the haze.

Such notions were childish, Henderson realized, but at the same time he understood that he and Avis were in a sense seeking to capture childhood. They had never known what it was to be a child.

One day they talked about it.

"I never had anyone to play with," Avis confessed. "When I was born, just about everybody in Daddy's generation was sterile, because of living at the time of the radiation. Besides, Fandom was just getting established and sometimes we had to hide. There was still part of the old Armed Forces in existence, and their leaders were trying to take over the country. And the General Party was operating—you remember, General Motors and General Electric and all the rest?

"Daddy says that Fandom won because we were better organized for communication, with our tapes and shortwave and our mimeographs—but most of all, because fans *trusted* one another. And the military and industrial groups were always fighting amongst themselves. You must remember how it was when you were a boy; we had a new President every month or so, because of all the assassinations."

Henderson nodded. "That's why my folks went underground for a while," he said. "Out near Peoria. They say Philip Jose Farmer lived there, too, you know."

"Then you know what I mean," Avis told him. "Daddy was a psychologist and he helped found the new Fandom. Naturally, everybody was out to get him. Even some of the first Fan Clubs were against him—those Shaverites and Palmerites and the other religious sects. We kept moving from place to place, never stopping for years. So I never knew any other girls my age and I never had any toys. By the time I was seven or eight, Daddy had me slipsheeting and cutting stencils for fanzines. We

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must have sent out millions, before he really got an organization going and we took over the newspapers. Gradually his plans took hold, though, and we got our people into radio and general publishing. And with their help we won the first real election."

"Seems hard to realize that was only sixteen years ago," Henderson mused. "I was still in Peoria when it happened. Finishing up my courses in a private school run by an old fan named Shaw. Claimed to be a grandson of the great Shaw, but couldn't prove it, of course. Said his father had been a member of the old Hydra Club. He was a bug on psychology: always talking about Hubbard and his disciple, Freud. He got me interested in the field—and that's how I met your father. And you."

"It worked out wonderfully, didn't it, darling?" The girl squeezed his hand. "And it's going to be even better from now on. You'll win the election, and we'll be together, and—"

John Henderson shook his head. "Don't oversimplify things," he answered. "You know, that's one of our big problems today. Everything is oversimplified. Did you know that there were over two billion people in the world at the time of the war, and almost a hundred and eighty million in this country alone? What's the population today? Maybe twenty million, at the most. Nobody knows, really, because we've never had a census. There are so many things we've never had, and must have. Public schools, for one thing. We can't go on educating our children in fan-groups forever. And we've got to teach them more facts and less legends. We've got to train more engineers and scientists and technicians and fewer artists and writers and multigraph operators. It's all very well to say we have half the population working the land and keeping us going, and that we have a few railroads running and some main highways in order, and even a fleet of Heinliners. But we need so much more! Why, it will take us another fifty years just to dig out the ruins of our cities, and then—"

"Please, you sound as if you were making a campaign speech," Avis protested. "You're talking like Daddy now."

"Your father is a wonderful man," Henderson said. "I don't know how I'll ever repay him for all he's done for me. He taught me, trained me, groomed me for this step by step ever since I was just a neo in the Beanie Brigade. He says he picked me for a future President, and I often suspect he picked me for your future husband."

"That happens to be *my* doing," Avis murmured. "Now, let's forget politics for a while."

And so they did, for the remainder of that afternoon and for the rest of a glorious week-end.

It was on the following Mon-

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day that disaster struck. Lionel Drake received the sudden short-wave message summoning him to FAPA Headquarters in Sturgeon —the new city which had risen on the outskirts of what had once been Philadelphia. And Avis accompanied him there for the day, leaving John Henderson alone at the farmhouse with a few servants and a secretary.

Henderson spent the morning going over his press notices in the current fanzines and preparing a statement denouncing the mutant theories of a rabid Van Vogt cult which had arisen to harass both FAPA and NFFF during the campaign. He did not go so far as to advocate the suppression of Van Vogt's books—it was a cardinal principle that everything rescued from the past be preserved and kept in print for educational purposes—but he cautioned fans everywhere not to take their reading too literally. "What would happen," he wrote, "if we accepted Bester and deCamp and Kornbluth as historians? We must remember that many of the Masters wrote in parable and allegory. Some of them, in their deep wisdom, saw fit to satirize their contemporaries and their times. Others, like the learned Poul, or Hans Christian Anderson, wrote outright fables. Van Vogt's extrapolations were not meant to be taken as gospel."

But were they?

Afterwards, in the early afternoon, Henderson slipped away and went for a walk. He did not choose the country path Avis had selected for their previous strolls, but struck off across the fields toward a cluster of abandoned farmhouses near what had once been a crossroads.

Henderson wanted to think. Here he was, a presidential candidate, a Big Name Fan among Big Name Fans, an authority who handed down pronouncements on the meaning of the scientific scriptures. But what did he know about it, really? Oh, he'd read all the books, of course—everything that had been salvaged from the rubble. The torn and battered Gnome Press editions, the dog-eared Doubleday relics now carefully preserved in a few remaining collections had long since been reprinted in the standard editions which served as texts in every fan-group school in the country. He'd studied them, just as the small contingent of technicians studied them; for clues to the past, for knowledge and guidance.

Henderson had never been one to question their authority. When excavators had come across actual college texts in the razed archives of the universities, they had collated them with the work of the great fan-writer Masters and found that these men based their work on sound scientific principles. This was definite proof that they wrote out of revealed wisdom. But some of their more advanced concepts—this business of mutant powers,

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of ESP, PSI, of anti-gravity, of space-travel—seemed unknown to the textbook writers.

Henderson had asked Drake and some of the others about this point. Drake told him that undoubtedly men like Heinlein and Margulies and Howard Browne were in possession of still greater secrets than they had chosen to reveal at the time—given another thirty years and probably they would have gone to the government and offered formulae which could send men soaring to the stars. But they didn't have another thirty years. The governments of the world, misusing Heinlein's theory, had chosen atomic destruction instead.

That was the story.

But was it true?

Several things puzzled Henderson. He was no heretic, no Fake Fan, but he couldn't help wondering. If fans had been so persecuted and powerless in the old days, how was it that Heinlein had gone to the government in the first place?

Why was it that some of the Masters' work survived in hard-cover books and the writings of others equally famous had never been found in the ruins? Why weren't there any copies of the first fanzines? Granted, almost everything had been destroyed in the years of warfare, and paper was most perishable—but surely somewhere a few samples should have survived. The addresses of many of the Masters were known; why hadn't the reclamation parties and the excavators made special efforts to seek the collections of Don Ford, Bea Mahaffey, Redd Boggs?

As it was, nothing remained but their names. Henderson had to admit it was all hearsay. He didn't know if Don Ford had been related to Henry Ford, the automobile manufacturer. Was Bea Mahaffey a stern-faced old lady or a brassy blonde? Had there really been an omniscient genius like Redd Boggs or was he just a FAPA legend?

Henderson found himself approaching the crossroads. To his surprise he discovered that a small group of farmers and local citizens were engaged in clearing the area surrounding the demolished dwellings. An ancient bulldozer had swept a swath at one side and allowed access to the crumbling foundations of four or five structures.

He approached, idle curiosity mingling with sudden fancy. This was Eshbach country, wasn't it? Nobody remembered the exact location of the Lloyd Eshbach residence, but here the famous fan-publisher had lived and died. Suppose a miracle occurred, and one of these ruined houses turned out to be his home? Suppose the searchers uncovered a whole cache of fan-literature, something he could use in the campaign? It was a wild, impossible thought, of course, but suppose—

Henderson nodded at some of

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the diggers. "Need any help?" he asked.

A short, stocky man lifted his head and stared at him without recognition. He wore no beanie and was obviously just a farmer.

"Sure, if you want to lend a hand. Grab a shovel." He indicated a pile of implements at the side of the road.

Henderson selected a rusty specimen and clambered down gingerly into the nearest cleared foundation.

"What are you looking for?" he asked.

"Typewriters, I guess." The stocky farmer wheezed as he worked. "District headquarters had an idea we might find some business machines here. Gang of us been donating one afternoon a week to excavating, these past few years. Turned up quite a bit of stuff around Reading. Now we're getting at these villages and crossroads places. Been at this one a month. But we've got down far enough so's we may strike something today."

"Any idea who used to live here?"

"Dunno. Headquarters tells us this might have belonged to an old-timer name of Polk."

Henderson gulped.

Polk. Was his dream about to come true after all? He knew that name, knew it well. There had been a Polk in ancient fandom—Chester A. Polk.

Obviously the name meant nothing to the farmer or his companions. They were just doing an assigned job. They lent their muscles to a routine task, shovelling out debris, stooping to pick up battered artifacts. But Henderson dug like a demon.

He wasn't interested in the antique furniture, the broken springs, the shards of chinaware. He didn't join the group that puzzled over the wallpaper pieces, or even stop to examine what had once obviously been a television set. There was no more television today, Henderson knew, and ordinarily he'd have been interested in seeing what a machine had looked like.

But not now. Not when there was a possibility of finding something greater. Filing cabinets, perhaps, and maybe a desk with a locked drawer—

He dug, and the sweat poured down his face. The sun sank lower and the farmer climbed out of the pit to join his fellows.

"Guess we'd better call it a day," he said. "Mebbe we'll strike something next week. Getting right down to the basement level: see where we can pry up the floorboards. This house must have been burned, not blasted."

Henderson nodded, but didn't look up from his digging.

"Aren't you coming out, fella?"

He shook his head. "I've got another hour to spare," he panted. "Mind if I just keep going?"

"Well, suit yourself." The farm-

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er hesitated. "But remember, if you find any machinery, stuff like that, it's public property."

"I'll remember," Henderson promised. "If I turn anything up, I'll bring it in to your district offices."

They must have left, but he didn't pay any attention to their departure. Because he had reached the floorboards now, and he was prying them up, and then he was down in the basement area. He waded knee-deep in debris, and clouds of dust arose to choke him. He blinked in the gathering twilight. Here was the rusty remains of an old-fashioned furnace; there was a broken table and on it something that gleamed dully.

Typewriter? Henderson approached it, then gasped. It was a Gestetner. A mimeograph machine —its drum broken, its crank dangling! And beneath the table was a large metal box. He stooped and pulled it free of the rubble, wiped the dust from the top.

He read the lettering crudely daubed in black paint. *Chester A. Polk—Private.*

Files? This was a file, a portable, two-drawer file. And the drawers could be opened. Henderson tugged at the rusty handles, and it wasn't exertion that made his heart pound.

The top drawer came open. Yellowed folders cascaded forth. Henderson picked one up at random. It bulged with letters—typewritten letters, handwritten letters. He looked at the date of the topmost sheet. *April 1, 1956!* He glanced through the message, then turned the page hastily and sought the signature.

Jim Harmon!

Jim Harmon, one of the old-time Masters—the man who had first advocated *Harmony,* or Universal Brotherhood in Fandom, in the pages of the old PEON magazine!

What if he found some copies of PEON itself?

Henderson hastily pulled open the second drawer.

He found PEON. He found PEON, and HYPHEN, and INSIDE, and a complete mailing—a FAPA mailing, the 75th. This was the fanzine collection, the fabulous fanzine collection of Chester A. Polk!

There was no thought in Henderson's mind now concerning district managers or the necessity of turning this material in. There was only the need of gathering up the magazines, gathering up the few hardcover books at the back of the file, and taking them to a safe place where he could read them. The sun wouldn't set for over an hour yet. If he carried everything to that spot under the trees where he and Avis usually rested, he could go through his find at leisure. And then, when he went back to the farmhouse, he'd find Avis and Lionel Drake and tell them, show them. An hour was all

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he needed. Just one hour, and then—.

It was almost three hours later that John Henderson staggered into the farmhouse.

Lionel Drake and his daughter heard the heavy footsteps in the hall, and Avis ran to meet Henderson as he leaned against the doorway.

"John, where have you been?" she murmured. "Daddy and I got back hours ago—nobody knew what had happened to you." She paused and stared up at his face. "What's the matter?"

Henderson didn't answer. He brushed past her, stumbled to the sofa, sat down, and buried his face in his trembling hands.

"For the love of Leiber, what's wrong?" the girl gasped.

Lionel Drake rose and walked over to the young man.

"Yes, what's the trouble?" he demanded. He nearly added, "You look as though you've seen a ghost," but there was no need to. For Henderson had produced a ghost. He pulled it out from his jacket pocket and extended it: a solid, palpable *revenant* in the form of a battered book.

Drake took it and read the title. "THE IMMORTAL STORM," he whispered. "A History of Science-Fiction Fandom by Sam Moskowitz." There was silence, then a sharp intake of breath. "Where did you find this?"

"Where I found the rest of the stuff," Henderson said, dully. "The copies of *Oopsla* and *Inside* and *Skyhook* and *A Bas* and all the others. In Chester Polk's basement." He nodded. "Yes, *the* Chester Polk. The one who got letters from Nancy Share and Joe Gibson and Earl Kemp and even William Rotsler. He went to Conventions. He played poker with Tucker, once. It's all there. Everything."

"Tell us about it," Avis soothed. "From the beginning. Daddy, isn't this marvelous?"

There was nothing in Lionel Drake's demeanor to indicate that he agreed. He stood there for a minute, holding "THE IMMORTAL STORM" in his gnarled hands. Then he put it down on the table.

"How about a drink?" he suggested. "After that we can talk."

Henderson accepted a drink, and downed a second one without an invitation. Then he just sat there and stared.

"Come on," Avis urged. "Tell us, now."

He didn't look at the girl when he replied. He stared at Lionel Drake.

"What is there to say?" he whispered. "You're not surprised, are you, Drake? You knew about the magazines—what they contained?"

The older man nodded silently.

"Other copies have been found before, I suppose; even copies of "THE IMMORTAL STORM?" And you and a few Big Name

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Fans have kept the discoveries from the rest—from fools like myself."

Avis Drake glanced at the two men in bewilderment. "What's all this about?" she asked.

Lionel Drake made a sudden gesture, but Henderson shook his head. "She might as well know the truth," he said. "It's about time somebody learned the facts. The way I learned them, this afternoon."

He faced the girl now, talked to her directly. "I found the old fanzines," he said. "And I read them. Oh, I couldn't go through everything thoroughly, and there are a lot of old letters, too, but I read enough to know what I'm talking about. For the first time in my life, I *do* know what I'm talking about. And that means everything I've ever believed in, everything I've been taught, everything I've tried to tell others as a candidate—is a lie.

"No, don't stop me. Your father knows. He and a few others have known all along, and deliberately withheld and distorted that knowledge, deliberately upheld the lies.

"First of all, fandom was never a persecuted minority. There were no martyrs, no dedicated group of scientists seeking a solution to the problems of the future. There were just men who wrote stories for publication—in the hard-cover books that survived and in the commercial magazines that have all been destroyed. Perhaps some of them were found again, but hidden away by your father and his friends.

"The men who wrote these stories were called 'pros' or even 'dirty pros' by the fans of their day. Some of them were talented writers, some of them even possessed sound scientific backgrounds—but they were not the inventors of the things they described. They were not even the greatest writers of their time.

"And the fans themselves were another, separate group. The legend has mixed up the commercial magazines with the fanzines. But fanzines were just amateur publications, privately mimeographed and distributed amongst a small circle. Most of the fans were quite young. Some of them were serious, yes, but not all of them. And they weren't bent on saving the world. They poked fun at themselves half of the time. Do you know what I read in one fan magazine? It said, *Fandom is just a goddam hobby.*"

Henderson paused and glanced at the copy of "THE IMMORTAL STORM." "There's more in the book. It tells about the very earliest fan organizations—how they fought and feuded, quarreled among themselves. The Big Name Fans weren't supermen. Tucker was a motion picture projectionist. Wollheim became an editor. So did Lowndes—he never was a

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doctor, and 'Doc' was just a nickname.

"So you see, it's all a myth, this story of Fandom keeping the torch of knowledge lighted in the darkness. They weren't saints, they weren't dedicated—just a gang of people who joked and bickered about a hobby. Yes, they had clubs and they had conventions, and they formed close friendships, and sometimes fans even married one another. But the rest is delusion. Lies and propaganda to feed the silly multitude—to elevate men like your father to power on the shoulders of stupid dupes like myself."

Henderson poured himself another drink. Avis began a silent sobbing. Lionel Drake sighed heavily and sat down in the armchair opposite the younger man.

"There's an old fannish saying," he murmured. "Where ignorance is Blish, 'tis folly to be wise." He paused, then continued. "What you say is true, of course. That's the way things were, and a small group of us has always known. We did find fanzines from time to time, and we have concealed them. Also we deliberately helped to create the myth of Fandom. But not because we wanted personal power."

"What other purpose could you possibly have had?" John Henderson demanded. "Setting up a falsified version of history, suppressing the facts, making what almost amounts to a religious cult out of Fandom?"

"We had one purpose," Lionel Drake replied. "To restore the world to sanity."

"You call this sanity? Elevating juvenile antics to heroic status, putting laurel-wreaths on the brows of money-grubbing writers, inventing a Golden Age out of whole cloth?"

"I do," said Drake. "Remember, I'm a psychologist. Oh, not one of the old-time, orthodox psychotherapists you read about. My field is mass-psychology, sociology perhaps. What I've done, and the others have done, is necessary.

"It's true we invented part of the story—the part concerning life before the coming of atomic warfare. But the rest, my boy, is true. You know it. Fandom *did* constitute the sole reliable nucleus remaining after the world was razed and ruined. As such, it formed a small operating-force that could help to restore order; at that time a very few men capable of operating a hand-cranked mimeograph could become a potent force. Remember, they trusted one another in an age where all men seemed surrounded by enemies.

"But rudimentary skill and simple trust were not enough. As a student of history, of sociology, we knew that. Every important group, every important political or religious or social movement, gains its strength from other sources; from legend. It is belief in legend

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that made the old-time movements strong—in the labor unions it was the story of Joe Hill and the Wobblies; in the Nazi Party it was the story of Hitler languishing despised and ignored in prison; I needn't remind you of the early Christian martyrs, or of the Young Republicans and their stories of Lincoln the rail-splitter. Out of the legends come the songs and stories, the fables and the folklore that gives men faith. Faith in their destiny, faith in their future. Fandom had to find its lengends in order to grow strong and succeed. An old psychiatrist named Jung pointed out the pattern common to all mythologies; demonstrated that men need heroes and sagas and epics to believe in, in order to survive in a civilized state."

"But you can't found a firm future on the basis of lies," Henderson whispered.

"Who says we can't?" Drake countered. "Our country was founded on the myths which sprung up around the Founding Fathers—Washington and the cherry tree, and all the rest of it. From the time of Romulus and Remus in ancient Rome, the myths have played their part in progress; giving men something greater than themselves to cherish as a heritage. And more important, in this instance, the legend has done its work.

"Fandom *did* help rebuild our world. Fannish forms of government *have* succeeded in restoring order. We no longer need armies in the nations founded on International Fandom. We have a working economy, yes, but it no longer rules the world through monetary power. For the first time since the days of Greece under Pericles, the artist and the creator play a respected and important role in life. Our commerce and our industry is slowly being rebuilt, but under sounder concepts than before. Educational facilities are increasing."

"You mean you're organizing means to spread more lies," Henderson retorted bitterly. "You've no real newspapers, no motion pictures, no television—"

"In time they will be restored," Drake said, calmly. "And so will the knowledge that we've retained for ourselves. Don't you think we know more than we've seen fit to reveal? We have the data with which to build atomic power-plants once more, to continue our rocketry experiments, perhaps to build an actual Moon-rocket within a generation. But our first concern must be to build a foundation for the better world to come. Yes, we choose to build it upon a myth —but surely it's a better myth than that which upheld the civilizations which have gone before. Would you want us to return to the old ways and the old myths—the Divine Right of Kings, the myth of Communism, or our own mind-crushing myth of the past which proclaimed that the Customer Is

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Always Right? Should we choose military mass-murderers as our new heroes, or exalt those who perverted pure science to the ways of destruction? The legend of the Big Name Fans preserved sanity in the world for the past generation. We can't abandon it now.

"I know what you're thinking, my boy. You'd like to quit the campaign, or go before the FAPA group and blurt out the truth. But what could you possibly gain? Isn't it better to aid in the cause—knowing that in the generation to come, men will continue to grow in knowledge and in achievement? The time will come when we can allow the legends to die; when we can take pride in present achievement, learn to dream about the future instead of the past. But for the moment mankind needs a dream of the past to counteract the nightmare reality of what actually occurred. That is the purpose of Fandom, the true and only purpose—to give men that dream and keep them sane."

Henderson glanced at Avis. The girl wasn't crying any longer. She was looking at him, waiting for his answer. In her eyes he read a curious mixture of love and loyalty, shame and fear. These emotions, he knew, were mirrored in his own gaze.

"If I go along with you," he said, softly, "I'm choosing the easiest way."

Drake opened his mouth to reply, but the girl spoke before him.

"No you aren't, darling," she murmured. "It will be the hardest way. To know the truth and yet not tell it. To carry the burden of guilt and deceit because it's necessary. To live a lie so that all other men can live the truth."

"Part of the truth," Henderson said.

"Yes, part of the truth. But their children—our children—can know it all."

Henderson rose and went to her. "Perhaps," he whispered. "We can try, anyway. I suppose we must try."

They walked outside together, out under the stars. Far overhead a Heinliner thundered across the sky. Henderson thought of the dreams that had made it a reality—the dreams, shattered for him forever, which he must help preserve for his fellow men.

Lionel Drake would help, Avis would help, and maybe he could endure the years to come. Fandom was still a way of life. Quite suddenly, John Henderson remembered another saying that had survived from the olden days—a saying he had read again in a fanzine just this afternoon. Now, for the first time, he grasped the ironic truth of its meaning.

Softly, still staring up at the stars, he quoted it aloud:

"It is a proud and lonely thing to be a fan."

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first law

by . . . Isaac Asimov

A bigger shadow loomed over me suddenly. . . .

MIKE DONOVAN looked at his empty beer-mug, felt bored, and decided he had listened long enough. He said, loudly, "If we're going to talk about unusual robots, *I* once knew one that disobeyed the First Law."

And since that was completely impossible, everyone stopped talking and turned to look at Donovan.

Donovan regretted his big mouth at once and changed the subject. "I heard a good one yesterday," he said, conversationally, "about—"

MacFarlane in the chair next to Donovan's said, "You mean you knew a robot that harmed a human being?" That was what disobedience to First Law meant, of course.

"In a way," said Donovan. "I say I heard one about—"

"Tell us about it," ordered MacFarlane. Some of the others banged their beer-mugs on the table.

Donovan made the best of it. "It happened on Titan about ten years ago," he said, thinking rapidly. "Yes, it was in twenty-five. We had just recently received a

Isaac Asimov, First Citizen of Science Fiction, and Professor Emeritus of Robotics, describes the one time when a robot, in a not too distant future, may perhaps violate the First Law—"A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm...."

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shipment of three new-model robots, specially designed for Titan. They were the first of the MA models. We called them Emma One, Two and Three." He snapped his fingers for another beer and stared earnestly after the waiter. Let's see, what came next?

MacFarlane said, "I've been in robotics half my life, Mike. I never heard of an MA serial order."

"That's because they took the MA's off the assembly lines immediately after—after what I'm going to tell you. Don't you remember?"

"No."

Donovan continued hastily. "We put the robots to work at once. You see, until then, the Base had been entirely useless during the stormy season, which lasts eighty percent of Titan's revolution about Saturn. During the terrific snows, you couldn't find the Base if it were only a hundred yards away. Compasses aren't any use, because Titan hasn't any magnetic field.

"The virtue of these MA robots, however, was that they were equipped with vibro-detectors of a new design so that they could make a beeline for the Base through anything, and that meant mining could become a through-the-revolution affair. And don't say a word, Mac. The vibro-detectors were taken off the market also, and that's why you haven't heard of them." Donovan coughed. "Military secret, you understand."

He went on. "The robots worked fine during the first stormy season, then at the start of the calm season, Emma Two began acting up. She kept wandering off into corners and under bales and had to be coaxed out. Finally she wandered off-Base altogether and didn't come back. We decided there had been a flaw in her manufacture and got along with the other two. Still, it meant we were short-handed, or short-roboted anyway, so when toward the end of the calm season, someone had to go to Kornsk, I volunteered to chance it without a robot. It seemed safe enough; the storms weren't due for two days and I'd be back in twenty hours at the outside.

"I was on the way back—a good ten miles from Base—when the wind started blowing and the air thickening. I landed my air-car immediately before the wind could smash it, pointed myself toward the Base and started running. I could run the distance in the low gravity all right, but could I run a straight line? That was the question. My air-supply was ample and my suit heat-coils were satisfactory, but ten miles in a Titanian storm is infinity.

"Then, when the snow-streams changed everything to a dark, gooey twilight, with even Saturn dimmed out and the sun only a pale pimple, I stopped short and leaned against the wind. There was a little dark object right ahead of me. I could barely make it out but

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I knew what it was. It was a storm-pup; the only living thing that could stand a Titanian storm, and the most vicious living thing anywhere. I knew my space-suit wouldn't protect me, once it made for me, and in the bad light, I had to wait for a point-blank aim or I didn't dare shoot. One miss and he would be at me.

"I backed away slowly and the shadow followed. It closed in and I was raising my blaster, with a prayer, when a bigger shadow loomed over me suddenly, and I yodeled with relief. It was Emma Two, the missing MA robot. I never stopped to wonder what had happened to it or worry why it had. I just howled, 'Emma, baby, get that storm-pup; and then get me back to Base.'

"It just looked at me as if it hadn't heard and called out, 'Master, don't shoot. Don't shoot.'

"It made for that storm-pup at a dead run.

" 'Get that damned pup, Emma,' I shouted. It got the pup, all right. It scooped it right up and *kept on going*. I yelled myself hoarse but it never came back. It left me to die in the storm."

Donovan paused dramatically, "Of course, you know the First Law: A robot may not injure a human being, or through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm! Well, Emma Two just ran off with that storm-pup and left me to die. It broke First Law.

"Luckily, I pulled through safely. Half an hour later, the storm died down. It had been a premature gust, and a temporary one. That happens sometimes. I hot-footed it for Base and the storms really broke next day. Emma Two returned two hours after I did, and, of course, the mystery was then explained and the MA models were taken off the market immediately."

"And just what," demanded MacFarlane, "was the explanation?"

Donovan regarded him seriously. "It's true I was a human being in danger of death, Mac, but to that robot there was something else that came first, even before me, before the First Law. Don't forget these robots were of the MA series and this particular MA robot had been searching out private nooks for some time before disappearing. It was as though it expected something special—and private—to happen to it. Apparently, something special had."

Donovan's eyes turned upward reverently and his voice trembled. "That storm-pup was no storm-pup. We named it Emma Junior when Emma Two brought it back. Emma Two *had* to protect it from my gun. What is even First Law compared with the holy ties of mother-love?"

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a matter of culture

by . . . Raymond F. Jones

Why did Sleth Forander want everything in the ship turned absolutely backwards?

NEXT to a funeral parlor, an idle assembly line is probably the most depressing sight in the world. At least to a production man. Ordinarily, Mack Wilde, Factory Manager of Wilkinson Spacecraft, avoided a route that would take him past the lines that hadn't budged in over three months. But now he almost ran past them, with a smile on his face, as he went down the gallery that led from the front office to the Chief Engineer's bailiwick.

George Mahoney looked up from his idle sketching and leaned on the drawing board with his elbows while the somewhat portly Mack regained his breath.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "The phone company take out all our lines and the office boys get laid off?" It had been days since he'd known the Factory Manager to leave his office.

"I'll overlook that," said Mack as he caught a final deep breath that restored him fairly close to normal. "In fact I'll overlook most anything except your continued warming that

The Ragalians were strictly from nightmares. Raymond F. Jones introduces us, in this exciting novelet, to the startling problems Wilkinson Spacecraft faced when the weird Ragalians, their particular needs in mind, wanted one hundred modified H 62's, modified their way. . . . There'd been times in his life when George Mahoney had cursed himself for his attempts at cleverness, and this seemed likely to be one of them, as Hugh Wilkinson went ahead, as they'd planned, risking all on the decision.

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stool. We've got work to do, boy!"

"What? Somebody order one Wilkinson Tiger?"

Mack leaned back against a drafting table along the opposite wall and tapped his fingers together lightly. "One hundred H-62 cruisers." He said it almost in a whisper so that it had the effect of prolonging George's reaction.

George failed to respond. His attention returned to the drawing as if Mack were not there.

The Factory Manager crossed the space between them and slapped his heavy palm on the drawing board. "You hear what I said? One *hundred* H-62's!"

"Yeah, I heard," said George. "Now I'll tell mine if you're ready. My Uncle Duffy wants nineteen Super-C cargo wagons to haul goose feathers from his farm out Harlamanian way."

Mack's face darkened as he rounded the board and grasped the engineer's arm. He jerked roughly. "This is on the level, George! I was just in the Old Man's office and he had a confirmation. The technical modification consultant is already here. He'll be in the plant this afternoon!"

George turned without expression on his face. "Who?" he said.

"Somebody named Sleth Forander, from Ragalian IX. Never heard of them before, but we checked their Galactic Import License. It's clean. And they'll take the standard H-62 with customary cultural modifications. This is *big*, George. It'll put us on our feet and in a position to level with Monarch and Apex for an equivalent subsidy. This is what we've been dreaming about for six long, sad years. And now we've got it! One hundred H-62's!"

"Why didn't Monarch or Apex get it?"

"Who knows? Who cares? Maybe the Ragalians like us better. They said they'd seen our Model H-62 and it was exactly what they wanted—with customary modifications, of course."

"There's a *reason,*" said George slowly. "If this actually is on the level, there has to be a reason. An independent like Wilkinson Spacecraft just doesn't take orders that size out from under the noses of the government-subsidized heavies. Not unless there's a *reason!*"

"Are you going to quibble over that?" Mack said, half-angrily. "Maybe Monarch and Apex are too busy to handle it."

"They know it would set us up to really compete with them instead of being confined to the small private ship and sports cruiser business."

"Well, whatever the reason, we've got the deal. I've already alerted my production team. Get the lead out and start going over those H-62 prints so you can throw in the modifications without keeping my men standing around on one foot for two weeks!"

George shook his head slowly. "No."

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"What do you mean 'no'? You putting in your resignation?"

"I mean no, I'm going down to the library and check up on the Ragalians, before we get sucked into something that'll clean the shirts the rest of the way off our backs. If this were any good we'd at least have had to fight Monarch and Apex for it. I've got a feeling that before this is over we'll wish Monarch or Apex *did* have the job!"

There was nothing to support his pessimism, however, in the data available from the central library. He studied the tapes for three hours and discovered their potential customers lived twenty seven light years away. They were peaceful—they had to be to get a license to import spacecraft!—and they were modest in technical accomplishments, hardly a step away from the agrarian level. But they were highly intelligent.

Physically, they were one of the weirdest that George Mahoney had ever encountered, but this was to be taken in stride. That's why cultural modification of ships was standard practice in foreign sales. Controls had to be specially designed for operation of the buyers. Tools had to be properly designed so that they could maintain their own vessels. Atmosphere mechanisms had to be installed to accommodate their environmental requirements, and physical size of the accommodations had to be adjusted, although, of course, there were limits to which this could be done.

As he scanned this data, George mentally pictured the modifications necessary to accommodate the Ragalians. Everything seemed well within the limits of tolerability. No special problems would be encountered as far as he could see.

But he still didn't like the set-up. There had to be a reason why Wilkinson was getting the deal, and not the big outfits who were subsidized to assist in development of long-range interstellar communication. Wilkinson had the benefit of the Monarch and Apex patents, but that still was not enough to offset the financial advantage enjoyed by the bigger companies.

It was true that this one order, if successfully completed, would put Wilkinson on a competitive basis, but George felt sure that their rivals were sure that the order would not be completed. Why, remained to be seen.

He knew he was missing the initial modification conference. He purposely stayed away long enough that he would miss it. There was never anything accomplished at the first meeting except a lot of meaningless introductory chit-chat about "How's the weather in March on Hemoglobin VI?" and "Our kids mature at sixteen percent of life expectancy; yours must be terribly retarded, old man."

Well, maybe not quite that bad, but close to it.

When he got back to the office,

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however, red tab alarms were ringing all over the place for him.

His secretary, Sylvia, was definitely pale as he showed up just as she was putting down the phone. She eyed him seriously. "I don't know whether it would be better for you to leave for Mars on the night express—or go up to the Old Man's office and face it. The choice is up to you."

He grinned. "I'll see the Old Man. I slept out one night the first time I was on Mars. Something must be up," he added on a note of question.

"Brother—is something up—!" Sylvia groaned.

The Old Man was Hugh Wilkinson, President and founder of Wilkinson Spacecraft. It was mostly personal affection for Hugh that kept the majority of technical personnel at the plant. They could have made half again as much in one of the bigger shops.

But Hugh Wilkinson was the original spacemen's space man. He'd barnstormed and fought his way through half the galaxy by the time he was fifty, traveling most of the time in spit-and-baling-wire ships that nobody expected to reach the next port. He almost literally built his ships as he went, and hundreds of his inventions now made space travel infinitely safer and more efficient in everything from sports jallopies to luxury space-time cruisers.

But he'd fought for independence all his life, and it was independence he intended to have, even though it now meant bucking the biggest spaceship construction interests in the Galaxy or on Earth. He believed he knew how to build a better spaceship than any of them, and he still had a few tricks up his sleeve to prove it.

George stopped a moment at the door marked President, while he grinned at Hugh's secretary. She was pale, too, as Sylvia had been. Must really have been some fireworks going on around the place, he thought. But from the interior of the office, there was absolute silence now.

He pressed the knob and walked in.

The only two men in the room were Hugh, and Mark Wilde. Mark was slumped low in the conference chair in the far corner of the room. Hugh was seated behind his desk, still straight, but chin lowered as he looked fiercely from beneath his heavy eyebrows.

"I heard you were looking for me," George said tentatively.

Neither man answered. The silence continued. He closed the door quietly and remained standing. "I didn't know you were having an hour of meditation," he said finally. "I'll be in the office when you want me." He moved to open the door again.

"Sit down!" Hugh Wilkinson roared.

Smiling a little forcedly, George complied. "Where were you when

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you should have been here this afternoon?" Hugh demanded.

"Working on the modification problems of the H-62's we're going to sell the Ragalians."

"That was nice," Hugh said bitingly. "So very thoughtful of you. Only it so happens that we aren't going to sell the Ragalians any H-62's!"

George kept his silence for a moment. He'd known it all along. The deal was too good to hope for. "What happened?" he said finally. "Where was the gimmick?"

"They don't want the H-62 at all!" Hugh thundered. "They want a whole new ship! That's what we needed you for this afternoon, to try to convince Sleth Forander of that."

"I don't understand."

"He insists they want an H-62—with modifications. But the modifications consist chiefly of removing the control room from the nose to the very bottom keel plate!"

"The what—?"

"You heard me. He wants the control room moved from the nose to the tail."

"I thought that's what you said!"

Mark spoke up from his corner for the first time. "It's silly! It's absolutely the silliest, most idiotic thing I ever heard of! Controls in the rear—"

"It's pretty nutty," George said, "but really no worse than some of the others we've done. We could rig up a system of remotes and servos to some kind of auxiliary control room down in the hull somewhere. After all, the customer is right—especially when he has to drive the rig!"

"I evidently haven't made it clear to you," the President said with patience in his voice as if talking with a little child. "Sleth Forander demands the control room be mounted directly on the keel plate. To him, that obviously puts all the rest of the works—engines, cargo space, living quarters—in the upper part of the vessel."

"He just wants an ordinary ship that flies backwards!" Mark cried in exasperation.

"I just can't quite believe you've understood the problem completely," said George seriously. "It doesn't make sense that they'd want everything in the ship turned absolutely backwards."

"We did our best," said Hugh Wilkinson. "We were terribly upset by the absence of the magnificent mind of our Chief Engineer during this afternoon's meeting!"

George grinned suddenly and stood up. "Come off it!" he said. He strode to the window and looked down at the yard. "I had the feeling in the beginning that we didn't have a chance on this contract, but this is so goofy that my confidence is returning. I am sorry I wasn't here, but you must have arranged further meetings. You didn't cut off negotiations completely?"

"No—Sleth Forander will be back. And when he does, we've got

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to have something to tell him!" Hugh leaned forward and bashed his fist against the desk top. "That means you. Can we build him the the kind of ship he wants out of an H-62? I told him we couldn't. He says Monarch and Apex told him the same thing regarding their similar models."

"So that's why we got a bid for the job!" George exclaimed. "I knew it had to be something like that!"

"You haven't answered my question."

George turned from the window. "Let's not give an answer just yet. We'd have to see-saw it back and forth with the cost-accounting department to determine whether a whole new ship or a modified 62 would be cheaper. I'd say that either way it would double the cost."

"He says Monarch or Apex would do it for one point six-tenths."

"They could—" George said bitterly.

"But Sleth Forander isn't authorized to pay more than our standard H-62 price."

Mark stirred again. "Then he'd better take his pretty little import license to some other galaxy! He's not going to do business here. What a chance it would have been to get on our feet and stand up to Monarch and Apex!"

"Now wait a minute—" George snapped each word with slow, brittle emphasis. "Everybody was so steamed up about this being our royal chance to get out of the hole and trying to convince me that it was so. All right, I got convinced. Just because we run into a little difficulty on modifications is no reason for junking the whole deal. Let's try to salvage it."

For the first time, Hugh Wilkinson smiled. His face beamed. "That's the kind of talk I like to hear! Now if I had a Factory Manager that was capable of looking on the bright side of things once in a while—"

Mark spread his palms and groaned.

"What ideas have you got as to how we can do this salvaging?" Hugh asked George.

"I haven't any," said George. "I want to see Sleth Forander. Out in space. I want to know just why he has to have his ships upside down and backwards!"

The first meeting with the foreign emissary produced little results for George. He didn't even get to see much of Sleth Forander, packaged, as the latter was, in a hermetically sealed can of blueish vapor. But from pictures on the library tape he knew what the creatures looked like.

The Ragalians were strictly from nightmares. They had a kind of pear-shaped torso, big end on top. A dozen fin-like appendages on the bottom served as feet. When they were in atmosphere suits, however, they just rolled about on little

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wheels, governed by motors inside.

For getting over obstacles they used the four powerful and completely flexible appendages on the upper part of their bodies, which were provided with fitted sleeves in the suits.

Their heads, George considered, were the most difficult parts of their anatomies to assess. The Ragalians suffered from the basic physical defect of homo sapiens: too many soft parts exposed to the environment. But in them it was carried to the extreme.

Their brains were among those soft parts, and totally lacked any kind of protective covering such as a skull. They were as exposed as the human eye.

They formed a wide, thick bump on the back of the upper torso. Sensory equipment in the form of two pairs of eyes, assorted olfactory surfaces, and hearing orifices were mounted on very stubby stalks projecting from the outer circumference of the brain boundary. They weren't long enough to project around the bulk of the torso, so that the creatures had the habit of turning from side to side almost constantly to see or hear or smell what was going on in front of them.

George approached the subject of the modification warily during their talks, trying to get at the purpose for putting the control room at the base of the ship, where only the engines rightfully belonged.

He sensed the contempt in the Ragalian's voice even through the suit and its attached translator. "Earth boy enormous fool," said Sleth Forander, "putting head on top; rock come along, head all gone."

"It doesn't make much difference out in space," said George, "whether you get your head or your bottom knocked off. Anything big enough to do one or the other is going to have the same effect."

"Put head in bottom, like so!" He jabbed a metal sleeved tentacle at the drawing he'd brought to show the changes his people demanded before purchase of the vessels.

"How do you know a rock isn't just as likely to hit there as on the other end of the ship?" George asked.

"Rock always hit on head," Sleth Forander said.

"But we can absolutely *prove* that the forward end of the ship is no more vulnerable than any other portion—and that the effect of a meteor collision is just as dangerous at one end as the other."

"Rock hit forward end; men not killed if in bottom."

"They are if the motors are forward, and are knocked out by the collision," said George. "It may take a little longer, but you're still a dead duck."

"Live duck," insisted the Ragalian.

This was getting nowhere, and George gave it up. "We can provide the ship you want," he said, "and

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I think we can come to an agreement on the price." He saw Hugh's eyebrows lift slightly at this, but he continued on. "I want to be absolutely sure, however, that by the time we start construction there will be no misunderstanding between us regarding your needs—as I feel there is at the present time. To help clear this up I'd like to have you accompany us on a cruise aboard an H-62 for a few days, provided that is satisfactory to you."

"Live in bottom, o.k." the Ragalian technician said.

George nodded. "Right. We'll fix you a bunk right down on the floor next to the engine room!"

Mark criticized the whole procedure as a waste of time. He'd written off all hope of coming to terms with the Ragalians and their ridiculous specifications. The time could be better spent hunting new business. Hugh was pretty much of the same opinion, but he agreed to see through any salvage effort George wanted to make.

"We know why Monarch and Apex gave the job up," the Chief Engineer pointed out. "So we're not in the dark on that score. Now, if we can find a way either to make a suitable modification, or get Sleth Forander to back down on his specifications, we're in the chips! We've got nothing to lose by trying!"

"Well, how long is this trip going to take?" Mark Wilde wanted to know. "Sleth Forander is chomping at the bit. The Ragalians seemed to have gotten the idea that Earthmen are capable of pulling rabbits out of any old hat. They demand completion of this deal in eight months."

George stared. "With modifications? They're crazy!"

"Maybe we'd better just tell him to take his license and shop for spaceships elsewhere then, huh?"

"No—we could give him standard ships with the normal amount of modification in that time. There's something so completely smelly about this demand for modifications, that I want to track it down before throwing in the sponge. It just isn't *rational*."

"What do you want to do about it?" Hugh asked.

"Rig a special ship and take him out as I told him. Put in thermocouples to train on him automatically by electroencephalographic response. Remote pulse and respiration counters. Hemoglobin colorimeters. When we get him back on home ground again, we'll know something about why he doesn't like ships with the nose where the nose ought to be."

"I told you time was short. We can't afford to horse around with all that special rigging. If we finally do end up taking a contract we'll have to accept a time penalty that will break us. I say forget the whole thing. It was a wonderful dream—but only a dream."

"We may as well make a try. That's not costing us anything, at

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least. Unless you'd *rather* sit around on your hands—"

Hugh gave him the go ahead, and he put the technicians on a round the clock basis to rig the ship for the Ragalian's special benefit. Even at that it was four days before the ship was ready to go.

The H-62 was a big ship, the biggest that a small yard like Wilkinson Spacecraft could turn out. She was a hundred and eighty feet high and forty-five in diameter. Fittings could be furnished for either cargo or passenger service or a combination of both. Only fourteen models had been built since the yard was organized by Hugh Wilkinson. Even he had begun to believe they might never make another one.

On the day of takeoff the ship rose smoothly from the port as the party settled themselves aboard. The vessel had an inertia control which was strictly a Wilkinson achievement. Even though forced patent sharing made it available to other companies there was a conviction in the trade that Wilkinson did a job of production that was not matched anywhere else.

The Ragalian was irritable and intractible, almost to the point of rudeness. He appeared to consider the delay in launching the vessel as a personal insult. But George assumed personal charge of the foreign technician and spent every available hour with him, absorbing his gripes with patient attempts at understanding.

The quarters prepared in the hold were such that the Ragalian could get out of his suit into an atmosphere normal to him. When visiting in the same room, George was the one to put on a protective suit. This gave the engineer a good chance to observe closely the physical makeup of his charge. He watched to the point of staring, absorbing the details of the Ragalian's bearing, gestures, his waddling walk, the occasional rippling that seemed to make the whole epidermis quiver in rare moments of excitement. Carefully, second by second, the hidden instruments recorded the pattern of Sleth Forander's physiological reactions.

After forty-eight hours George considered that he had a sufficient record of the Ragalian's norm on the charts. He proposed then a tour of the ship. The visitor agreed without visible expression. George wondered what the charts would show of that moment.

Outside the special chamber, the Ragalian moved clumsily along in his can-like suit. Gravity was adjusted to make it easier for him to balance with the long arms.

George took him first to the engine room and pointed out the massive main thrust members that absorbed the titanic push of the drive chambers. "Here's where the most difficult modification will have to take place," he said. "It will be necessary to redesign the entire thrust structure. You see, if it is located in the nose, along with

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the engines, it will still be necessary to provide a reaction passage along the entire axis of the ship, piercing the living quarters and cargo space. This will require enormous amounts of insulation, of course, and reduce the pay-space of the vessel accordingly.

"The only alternative would be to arrange a kind of Christmas-tree effect and hang the reaction chambers outside the vessel up near the nose, letting them thrust into free space outside the hull. Either way, however, is tremendously complicated and inefficient. You wouldn't be getting the kind of ship you're riding in now. I honestly don't think you'd be satisfied with it."

He couldn't tell what was going on inside the can. The Ragalian was hardly visible in the swirl of blue vapor that backed the face plate. But he knew the hidden recorders were getting the data and felt a compulsive desire to take a look at them right now. But that would have to wait.

He showed the way around the vast pile room, explaining in detail how the enormous nuclear energy was converted to thrust and expended in the drive chambers. The Ragalian seemed enthusiastic and spent endless hours asking questions about the details of this operation.

When they were through and ready to go back to his chamber he paused a moment and glanced upward. "Engines up there; perfect ship then. Men belong down here."

Mark Wilde came up behind George as the engineer took the charts out of the recorder and unrolled them on the long table in the work room.

"Your gizmos giving out with all the secret yearnings of our pear-shaped friend?" he asked.

George shook his head. "I can't interpret everything that's on here. I expect to need Nat's help on that. But it's a cinch that he goes through a change every time he considers the ship. I expect to get him upstairs in a couple more days. I'll bet the bottom drops out of some of these lines."

"*If* you get him up," said Mark.

George took it easy. He spent another day in the lower parts of the ship and talked by radio to the company Director of Personnel Psychology, Dr. Nathanial Bergstrom. Nat was highly interested in the outcome of the experiment. He offered suggestions for prodding Sleth Forander, but he didn't see how the outcome of this investigation could posibly affect the company's relationship with the Ragalians in accepting or rejecting a contract to build ships for them.

George didn't argue. He wasn't too sure of his own ground. But he felt he was beginning to get a clue.

It was two days later that he proposed a tour of the upper regions and control room of the ship. Sleth Forander hesitated only an instant, then agreed.

There was no outward sign of disturbance as the elevator carried

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them upward. It was only in the first moment of stepping out into the control room that the foreign technician showed visible agitation. The control room was surrounded by visio-plates on walls and ceiling so that the effect was one of standing on the naked prow of the ship with nothing but empty space above and all around.

"We can turn these off," George suggested, "if it makes you uncomfortable—"

"No—" Sleth Forander said instantly. But George could detect the quivering of his arm tips in the tight fitting sleeves as one evidence of his inner agitation. "Men's ship," Sleth Forander continued. "Foolish design, but that men's way. You build better way for Ragalian. I ride ship your way until then."

But he stayed only an hour, although the intricate controlling mechanisms were worth a full day of the kind of interest he'd shown in other parts of the ship.

George returned again to the control room after accompanying Sleth Forander back to the hold. "That's it," he said. "Turn it around and let's go home. I think we've got the story we need."

"I don't see that we've got anything at all," said Mark Wilde pessimistically. "This whole thing has been a useless goose chase and we still aren't going to be able to deliver what they want the way they want at the price they want to pay, and when they want to pay it."

The trip had been a circular one about the Solar System and they were near enough home to land that same afternoon. George took the recording charts at once to the office of Nat Bergstrom.

The psychologist whistled with interest as he laid out the long tapes. "There's one nervous boy," he exclaimed. "What in the world did you do to him here at the last? I'd be willing to bet that he's suffering right now from one man-sized case of some Ragalian brand of psychosomatic illness."

"Took him up to the control room for an hour," said George.

"It looks more like the record of a kid who'd blundered into the spooky cellar of an abandoned house at midnight. He all but had the screeming meemies!"

"And nothing to cause it. That's what you'd call a pretty clear-cut neurotic reaction, isn't it?"

Nat Bergstrom smiled and shook his head. "I wouldn't call it anything, particularly. How can you possibly assign it as a neurotic reaction or not? You know nothing of the Ragalian norm, outside of the little you recorded before taking him up to the control room. That means nothing, relatively speaking. It may be completely normal to react in such a manner in such a place—if you're a Ragalian."

"It's neurotic if there's no adequate stimulus!" George protested.

"How do you know there wasn't?"

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"Well—there just *wasn't.*"

"For you. Not necessarily for Sleth Forander. Obviously, the stimulus was there, or he would not have reacted in this manner. You engineers are so forgetful sometimes that your normalcy can't always be imposed over another individual's quite different normalcy. It may be quite normal for a Ragalian to react with panic in such surroundings as you imposed. The stimulus may be quite adequate."

"That would mean there would be nothing we could do about it!"

"What do you want to do?"

"Sell him a hundred standard H-62's."

Nat shook his head again. "You'd probably have to induce a major basic change in the Ragalian character, from what you've told me."

"I'll do that, if I have to! But I still say it's neurotic to get the screeming meemies just because you're on top of a spaceship instead of the bottom."

"Maybe. I'll give you a hand, if you want me to. Perhaps we can find out just what the nature of the reaction is, and its stimulus."

"No." George rolled up the charts and started for the door. "I think I can handle this myself. It's strictly a problem in engineering, and I think I've got all data I need. I'll let you know if I need help."

It was neurotic anyway you looked at it, he told himself as he went toward the main offices again. There was no element of rationality in the Ragalian's reaction. Of course, Nat had a point. Exactly who could define rationality for a given species or even an individual?

Well, in this case it could be done by the guy that wanted to sell a hundred 62's. It had to be done if they were going to be sold. And they had to be sold if Wilkinson Spacecraft was to have its present chance for survival.

He stopped on the way and picked up the reports prepared by his engineering staff in his absence. A quick glance told him it was what they'd expected.

Hugh and Mark were waiting when he reached Hugh's office. He slapped the reports on the desk and sat down. "Removal of the control room to the keel plate and moving the engines and quarters to the nose would cost us an eighty-nine percent re-design of the thrust skeleton," he said. "That means approximately the same percentage of new dies and jigs. It means design of an entirely new thrust channel and sufficient research to find a lining material that will permit living quarters on the other side of it. Complete redesign of control structures is called for—"

"There's no need of going on," said Hugh. "What's the cost figure?"

"Two point twelve."

"And Monarch and Apex can do it for one-six."

"I guess that lets us out," said

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Mark. "Now, I've been thinking: if we could increase the demand for Tigers—"

"There's *one* answer," said George quietly. "One way we might pull out of this whole thing and find ourselves on top."

Hugh Wilkinson looked at him, the bushy brows heavy over narrowed eyes. "What's that way?" he said.

"You've got to gamble," George replied. "Gamble the whole yard, everything you've built up—there'd be no starting over again if you lost. There wouldn't be anything left to start with, except your bare hands."

"It wouldn't be the first time I was in such a fix," said Hugh. "What's your answer?"

"Sign the contract. Go ahead and build standard 62's, modified only in the customary manner to adapt for standard environmental requirements."

"Leave the control room in the nose?" cried Mark.

George nodded. "Leave the control room in the nose."

"And where would that put us when the Ragalians found we hadn't built according to specifications?"

"That's the gamble we take. They'd either buy them the way we built—or we'd be stuck with a hundred H-62's on our hands, representing the entire asets that Wilkinson Spacecraft owns and could borrow or steal."

"You're crazy!" Mark exclaimed.

"Let's have it," Hugh demanded. "Either put up or shut up!"

George unrolled the charts he'd recorded aboard the spaceship. For an hour he explained carefully all his observations and conclusions regarding Sleth Forander. He told of Dr. Nat Bergstrom's comment on the recorded data.

"It's as clear a case of neurosis as you'll ever hope to find," George concluded. "It's not only a neurosis in Sleth Forander himself, but in his entire race. At one time it may have had distinct survival value, but not any more. It's a holdover from a reaction determined ages ago. Today it's obsolete, and if that isn't neurosis, I don't know what is. Of course I'm only an engineer," he added apologetically, "and my only purpose is in selling spaceships, but I'd stake my reputation on this analysis."

"You're asking a lot more than that," said Hugh dryly. "You're asking me to stake Wilkinson Spacecraft."

George shook his head. "No—I'm not asking. I'm merely pointing out what could be done. If I owned the yard I doubt I'd have guts enough to make the gamble. But I don't own it."

"Suppose we agree it is neurosis? Where do we go from there?"

"While we're building the standard models, we cure the neurosis in Sleth Forander. He'll have the ships sent home and do likewise for the rest of his people—or

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they'll cut his throat on arrival. But we'll be in the clear. They've given him complete authority to deal in this matter."

Hugh Wilkinson shook his head slowly. "If I were a younger man—" Then he looked up and a fresh light seemed to come into his eyes. "What difference does that make? I'm *still* young enough! We'll put the yard in the position where it belongs—or start again with bare hands if that's necessary! We'll build the ships your way, George.

"My only reservation is that I get to take you apart, piece by piece, with these bare hands if it doesn't work out the way you plan!"

There were times in his life when George Mahoney soundly cursed himself for his attempts at cleverness, and this was one of them. The days that followed Hugh Wilkinson's decision were the blackest he'd ever known.

He watched the assembly lines going into action, producing the components that were fed slowly to the big yard where the giant cruisers would be assembled. He watched the construction of control room assemblies—which would go where control rooms had always gone—and the building of the special atmosphere plants that would produce the blue vapor the Ragalians breathed and lived in.

Every asset that Hugh Wilkinson could put his hands on was tied up in the production of those vessels. As soon as the Ragalians discovered non-compliance with specifications and the banking agencies looked into the matter—Hugh Wilkinson would be finished. George knew there was no sense in talking about a start with bare hands any more. Hugh would be washed up for good. In this galaxy, at least—

He turned over the engineering to his staff. It wasn't very complicated anyway, now that standard models had been determined upon. But Sleth Forander grew more complex by the day. George assumed responsibility for his comfort and welfare, and was under constant prodding from Hugh: "Let's get this neurosis of his cured early. Then we'll know we're in the clear. But how do we know when he's cured, anyway?"

George didn't know the answers. He hoped to find them as he went along, the way you do in any engineering problem. But he rapidly became aware that he wasn't dealing with ordinary engineering material, while at the same time he'd committed himself to a definite, specific answer. That took the problem somewhat out of the realm of ordinary engineering procedure. It placed it smack in the middle of plain, unadulterated idiocy.

Unexpectedly, however, Sleth Forander helped a little. With the contract signed and production under way, he seemed to unbend. "Like to see Earth," he said to

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George. "Know cities and ways of men."

He was just an ordinary tourist at heart, George decided. With his mission accomplished, he wanted to get out and see the sights. And then it hit George like an inspiration just what sights to show him.

He spent a number of days giving the Ragalian a background of Earth's history, pointing up the epic rise of man from the caves to the seas and plains and valleys. He told how mankind has spread and conquered the Earth.

He took his guest to museums that showed tangible evidence of this conquest. He took him to the great power plants and manufacturing centers and showed him the vast cities that were spread out upon the surface of the Earth. He spent two months on a world tour —at company expense.

In London, he got a blistering communication from Hugh Wilkinson, wanting to know if he'd completely lost his mind. In Egypt, where they'd gone to see the pyramids, he got one informing him that he'd be taken into custody by agents of the local constabulary unless he returned at once. He and Sleth Forander took off immediately for India, where they lost themselves for a week.

In the end he refused all communications from Wilkinson and was aware that agents were on his trail. It was difficult eluding them with so conspicuous a figure as the Ragalian in tow, but somehow he managed. When he finally returned home, he observed, from the craft in which they were flying over the city, that sixteen finished hulls were lined up in the Wilkinson yard. The others would be coming out at a fast rate now, he knew. It was time to take some action.

Again, Sleth Forander obligingly provided the cue. He hadn't yet reported to Hugh, and he and Sleth were seated in the latter's quarters, provided by the government for such as he. George was encased in a protective suit and Sleth was standing by the window looking out.

"Earth wonderful place," he said with a pensiveness that seemed to come through clearly over the translator. "Men great conquerors. Always move up, change world, space—other worlds. My people—we fail. Ten thousand generations same.

"All worlds we see, all creatures visit us—we like Earthmen best. We most like be Earthmen. Why we buy Earth ships."

George took a deep breath and felt the slightly stale air of his tanks filling his lungs. This was it. This was the time to blast. And if he misfired, Wilkinson Spacecraft was a dead duck.

"You can't make yourselves like Earthmen just by buying Earth ships," he said.

"Know that—" Sleth Forander said, turning from the window. There seemed to be a sense of wistful apology in his voice. "So many

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things needful. We try. We fail. Earthmen so great, so successful."

For a moment, George felt a sense of pity for the alien technician. He saw the reason for the irritable truculence Sleth Forander displayed at first. His deep, kind admiration for Earthmen had made it necessary to build a wall against them. Now that wall was down. George almost regretted what he had to say.

"You don't go forward by walking backwards," he said slowly.

The Ragalian stood motionless as if struck by a blow. No sound or expression came from his still form for a full minute. Then he said almost inaudibly, "Understand?"

"I think you understand, all right," George answered. "At least I'll bet your anthropologists do. If you had any decent engineers they'd know it, too. Those flippers of yours are designed for moving strictly in the other direction, and five hundred thousand or a million years of deliberately walking backwards hasn't altered their basic form."

"You insult!"

"Don't get on your high horse. You asked for it. I think you know intuitively what I'm talking about even if you don't know it otherwise.

"The whole picture is as plain as your desire to build ships with control rooms where the engines belong. Look: mankind has the same problem, too. Not as bad as yours, I'll admit, but bad enough. We've got soft, easily damaged bodies that have to be handled with care to keep them from getting squashed in a world where squashing is easy.

"Your case is just a little worse. Mother Nature on your world really really played a dirty trick, putting your brains right out in the open with only a thin membrane between them and a brutal, destructive environment.

"It was a matter of life or death to protect the delicate, exposed organ. The survival of the race depended on it. Everything you do now, everything you've ever done, is geared to protection of this one terribly vulnerable physical characteristic. And some ages ago, your race even hit on the incredible solution of protecting it with the rest of your body by actually walking backwards!"

"Insult! Go!" The fierce arms of sinew lashed out suddenly, coming within a hair width of George's face. A sudden chill rippled the length of his spine. He hadn't anticipated this, but Sleth Forander could rip open the suit with a single flick of those deadly arm tips. Death in that bluish atmosphere would not be pleasant.

"I have a couple more things to say," he continued quietly. "Then I'll go if you want me to.

"If you had the experience with mechanisms that I have had you'd recognize at once that the form and function of a machine is invariably an expression of the attitude, illu-

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sions and ideals of the race creating it. You tipped your hand right off the bat by the irrational insistence on putting the control room of the ship against the keel plate.

"You couldn't tell me why. It just *had* to be that way, that's all. And any other form of design scared the daylights out of you. Simply because for a good many thousands of generations your entire culture had been built on the principle of protecting the head. This is so strong you demand that it be carried out even in your machines—and you didn't know why!"

The tips of sinew quivered as if Sleth Forander were fighting to restrain their power. George tried to ignore their closeness and went on. "There's a principle here," he said. "A very basic principle. Risk. You have to take a risk every time to take a step ahead. Risk to your vulnerable parts, whether it be in your physical body or your secret dreams.

"We learned that a long time ago. You have never learned it, because you demanded one hundred percent protection and no risk at all to your vulnerable spot.

"It's engraved on your souls so deeply that I doubt anything can ever rub it out. I doubt that Ragalians will ever learn how to turn about and face the stars, or whatever it is that beckons them. You don't have the courage, or you'd have long ago discovered you can't back your way along an upward trail.

"If you think I'm wrong, however," he went on more quietly, "now's your chance to prove it. We haven't built your ships the way you asked for them. We've put the control center up front, where it belongs. If you've got guts enough, take these ships and face the stars as you try to make your way among them. I don't think you have. I don't think you've got the guts to turn around and walk forward, facing the world, instead of backing from it!"

He saw the attack coming and leaped from it. He knew he didn't have a chance if those arms reached him with their slashing tips. But Sleth Forander didn't pursue. He stood still in the center of the room, crying a chill, wailing cry of doom while ripples of movement and changing hue moved over the surface of his body.

"Go!" he shrieked finally. "Go! Kill— Kill—"

George reached the door of the airlock and snatched at it, sealing himself in while the Ragalian collapsed on the other side of the transparent panel.

He removed the suit outside the chamber and hung it up. When he looked back Sleth Forander was still collapsed on the floor. He didn't know what to do. Certainly he'd touched off a long-delayed time bomb all right, but he hadn't counted on such a physical reaction. It couldn't be bad enough to—

He put the ugly thought out of his mind and called the physician

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assigned to the aliens. When the man came he said nothing about what had occurred between them. He had to get away for the moment. Sleth Forander would be as safe in the doctor's care as he could possibly be. There was nothing more that George Mahoney could do. It looked like he'd really done his bit!

He reported to Hugh Wilkinson, listened to ten minutes of the Old Man's tirade before cutting off, and went to bed to sleep the clock around. He hadn't realized the extent of physical exhaustion the past few weeks had cost him.

When he awoke again it was to the sound of the phone once more, and Hugh Wilkinson's voice roared out as he answered it! "Mahoney! You had something to do with it—I know you did! If Sleth Forander dies, you're going to be in one unholy jam. Get down here and let's get our story together before they come for you!"

A breath of cold air seemed to pass over George. "Die? What are you talking about? He just fainted last night. Exhaustion of the trip or something. I called the doctor."

"And the doctor doesn't call it exhaustion or something like that. He says Sleth Forander is in a state of shock that looks like the result of some kind of attack. Did you get in a fight with him?"

"I wouldn't be here if I had. But I'll be down."

He dressed in a kind of frenzy. It wasn't possible that his jolt was capable of doing this to the Ragalian. He interrupted his dressing to put in a call to Nat Bergstrom, asking him to meet at the plant. Then he finished dressing and exceeded the speed limit all the way to the yard.

The others were waiting for him when he arrived. He plunged into a description of his last interview with Sleth Forander. "Everything I suspected was true," he said. "His attitude admitted the whole thing. It was so big he just couldn't take it, isn't that right, Nat?"

The psychologist nodded. "I'm afraid it is. You can't just take the basic premise of a person's life and blast it to oblivion. The same goes for other-world creatures. Evidently Sleth Forander's whole existence evolves around protection of his brain, as you guessed. That's why merely going into the exposed control room on the ship produced such a neurotic-appearing reaction. From our point of view it was neurotic. From his, it was perfectly normal. Rock come along; head get knocked off, as he says. He's right."

"He's not right!" George cried. "His people have gone beyond the stage where it's right. They want to get out into space and get a footing that their intellectual potential deserves. This protect-your-brain-at-all-cost business has got to go by the boards. They can build special hats, graft a bony skull over the brain, any one of a thousand things, but they've got to admit the

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present uselessness of their over-concern for their brains!"

"What will happen if they don't?"

George regarded him without expression. "We won't sell a hundred 62's that are beginning to pile up in the yard. That's what'll happen!"

"Then I'm afraid they'll just have to pile up. You aren't going to sell them to Sleth Forander—or any other Ragalian. I can promise you that!"

"I'll cover anything you want to let talk for you. We've gone too far now—"

"I think we have," said Hugh. "You are forgetting the doctor's report is that Sleth Forander is in critical condition. Supposing he survives, what will have to be done with him, Nat?"

"Ship him back home as soon as possible," said the psychologist. "If they've got the equipment, they can wipe out all memory of his visit to Earth. He'll likely be as good as new then. I wouldn't worry too much about his dying. I think he'll pull through the shock. I'm sorry things turned out this way on your deal, though. That wipes out Wilkinson Spacecraft, doesn't it?"

Hugh nodded. "It was a good gamble. I knew what I was doing. There's only one thing left—" He looked meaningly at George Mahoney.

"We're not through," said George quietly. "You don't give up an engineering problem just because your computer jams. You feed it new data until it unjams. Keep that production line rolling, Mark. The Ragalians are going to buy your 62's."

"Wait! Where are you going?" Hugh demanded.

"To unjam a computer!"

They were reluctant to admit him at the hospital for extra-terrestrials, to which Sleth Forander had been taken. "Absolutely no visitors," the nurse told him.

"I'm the only friend he's got," George protested. "He's here on a one-man purchasing mission. His nearest embassy is a dozen light years away. How would you like to be dying so far from home and not even allowed to see your one friend?"

"I don't know—" The nurse looked him over dubiously. "You'll have to talk with the doctor—"

He went through the same story again with the physician, and then with the director of the hospital. They checked with the government personnel division handling foreign visas. He was finally given approval for a ten minute visit when Sleth Forander was able to speak.

That was not until the next morning. George spent the night in the hospital waiting room. He was groggy for sleep when they at last told him he could go in.

He hoped no one was looking as he stepped through the lock in his protective suit and greeted the Ragalian. Sleth Forander turned his

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ponderous body slowly on the bed and recognized George. A wave of tremor shook him.

"Sleth—" George said softly. "I'm going to be here just a minute and then I'm going. I came to say just one thing. You can get well as soon as you want to. You're sick because you haven't made a decision. Make one and get well, Sleth.

"You can decide that everything I told you was a lie, and go back home and forget about it. You'll be well very soon. Or you can admit whatever truth you found in the things I said—and make the necessary changes. That'll make you sick for quite a while maybe, but you'll get over it eventually. An individual's way of life is a manifestation of his physical structure. Change one and you always have to change the other. It's invariably a painful process.

"Make up your mind. Either way. A calculating machine can't function when it's trying to give two answers to the same question. Neither can a human brain—or a Ragalian one. Reach a decision. Then get well. I'll be back later, Sleth."

He paused at the lock door for a moment. The Ragalian was looking at him with searching eyestalks. The tremors had ceased. "You friend," he said. "Come back—"

George took a deep breath. "Yeah—I'll be back."

Hugh refused to believe there was any chance now. He had already ordered production lines stopped and was making an attempt to liquidate stocks and supplies on hand in the hope of being able to save the yard.

But that same afternoon George was called back to the hospital. Sleth Forander insisted on seeing him again.

"I decide," the Ragalian said as soon as he was in the room again. "Decision to be Ragalian; bury head. Or be like Earthman; go forward, head up. Decide go forward; let rocks come."

George couldn't restrain the kind of choked feeling he felt at the base of his throat. "That's a good decision Sleth," he said. "You won't regret it. What about your people?"

"Admire Earthmen. Want forward motion like Earthmen. Tell them only way is face to stars. They angry. Have to believe. Tired being backward Ragalian."

"You'll take the ships the way we've built them, then?"

"Take ships. Ragalian go to stars. Head up. Like Earthmen!"

They let him go from the hospital. There was nothing to keep him there, since his physical reactions had vanished with the making of his decision.

George knew he hadn't told half of it. Going back home and trying to sell his people on the Earth-type ships would be no easy task. He felt a momentary guilt over what

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he had done. Had it been right, after all? He hadn't set out to altruistically set the Ragalians on the right track. His only interest had been in selling them a hundred cruisers.

But maybe what Sleth Forander had said was true. Maybe there had come a point in the development of his people at which they were ready to make a shift. They could be ready to assume the risks they had fought against until now. Their admiration of Earth and its men and machines could be an expression of that readiness.

George didn't know, but he hoped and believed this was so. He wanted it to be so because of his friendship for Sleth Forander.

Hugh was all but speechless when George brought the Ragalian to the office again for personal confirmation of his intent to purchase the cruisers as they were.

"I guess I was right the first time," he murmured in dazed wonder. "I *am* getting too old for this kind of gamble. But then, with the position Wilkinson Spacecraft will be in, I won't have to gamble, ever again."

Mark Wilde had difficulty believing it, too. "You'd like to make us think you knew what you were doing every step of the way!" he said. "But it was nothing but plain dumb luck. Quit while you're winning, boy. Don't ever try anything like that again!"

But Nat was thoughtful. "Imagine it," he said. "You've probably shifted the culture of an entire race —just to sell them an order of spaceships—" He shook his head in disbelief.

"Don't give me too much credit," said George. "It just didn't figure from an engineering standpoint. Control room built on the keel plate! Imagine *that*, if you can!"

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she only goes FUD out at night...

by . . . William Tenn

What would you do if you fell in love with a girl like this?

IN THIS part of the country, folks think that Doc Judd carries magic in his black leather satchel. He's *that* good.

Ever since I lost my leg in the sawmill, I've been all-around handyman at the Judd place. Lots of times when Doc gets a night call after a real hard day, he's too tired to drive, so he hunts me up and I become a chauffeur too. With the shiny plastic leg that Doc got me at a discount, I can stamp the gas pedal with the best of them.

We roar up to the farmhouse and, while Doc goes inside to deliver a baby or swab grandma's throat, I sit in the car and listen to them talk about what a ball of fire the old Doc is. In Groppa County, they'll tell you Doc Judd can handle *anything*. And I nod and listen, nod and listen.

But all the time I'm wondering what they'd think of the way he handled his only son falling in love with a vampire . . .

It was a terrifically hot summer when Steve came home on vacation—real blister weather. He wanted to drive his father around and kind of help with the chores, but Doc said that after the first

A number of things and people live in the shadows of this strange FANTASTIC UNIVERSE *of ours. William Tenn, whose* OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS *(Ballantine) was reviewed here some time back, and who has a disturbing familiarity with such matters, introduces us to the lonely and lovely Tatiana.*

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tough year of medical school anyone deserved a vacation.

"Summer's a pretty quiet time in our line," he told the boy. "Nothing but poison ivy and such until we hit the polio season in August. Besides, you wouldn't want to shove old Tom out of his job, would you? No, Stevie, you just bounce around the countryside in your jalopy and enjoy yourself."

Steve nodded and took off. And I mean took off. About a week later, he started coming home five or six o'clock in the morning. He'd sleep till about three in the afternoon, lazy around for a couple of hours and, come eight-thirty, off he'd rattle in his little hot-rod. Road-houses, we figured, or some sleazy girl . . .

Doc didn't like it, but he'd brought up the boy with a nice easy hand and he didn't feel like saying anything just yet. Old buttinsky Tom, though—I was different. I'd helped raise the kid since his mother died, and I'd walloped him when I caught him raiding the ice-box.

So I dropped a hint now and then, kind of asking him, like, not to go too far off the deep end. I could have been talking to a stone fence for all the good it did. Not that Steve was rude. He was just too far gone in whatever it was to pay attention to me.

And then the other stuff started and Doc and I forgot about Steve.

Some kind of weird epidemic hit the kids of Groppa County and knocked twenty, thirty, of them flat on their backs.

"It's almost got me beat, Tom," Doc would confide in me as we bump-bump-bumped over dirty back-country roads. "It acts like a bad fever, yet the rise in temperature is hardly noticeable. But the kids get very weak and their blood count goes way down. And it stays that way, no matter what I do. Only good thing, it doesn't seem to be fatal—so far."

Every time he talked about it, I felt a funny twinge in my stump where it was attached to the plastic leg. I got so uncomfortable that I tried to change the subject, but that didn't go with Doc. He'd gotten used to thinking out his problems by talking to me, and this epidemic thing was pretty heavy on his mind.

He'd written to a couple of universities for advice, but they didn't seem to be of much help. And all the time, the parents of the kids stood around waiting for him to pull a cellophane-wrapped miracle out of his little black bag, because, as they said in Groppa County, there was nothing could go wrong with a human body that Doc Judd couldn't take care of some way or other. And all the time, the kids got weaker and weaker.

Doc got big, bleary bags under his eyes from sitting up nights going over the latest books and medical magazines he'd ordered from the city. Near as I could tell he'd find nothing, even though lots

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of times he'd get to bed almost as late as Steve.

And then he brought home the handkerchief. Soon as I saw it, my stump gave a good, hard, extra twinge and I wanted to walk out of the kitchen. Tiny, fancy handkerchief, it was, all embroidered linen and lace edges.

"What do you think, Tom? Found this on the floor of the bedroom of the Stopes' kids. Neither Betty nor Willy have any idea where it came from. For a bit, I thought I might have a way of tracing the source of infection, but those kids wouldn't lie. If they say they never saw it before, then that's the way it is." He dropped the handkerchief on the kitchen table that I was clearing up, stood there sighing. "Betty's anemia is beginning to look serious. I wish I knew . . . I wish . . . Oh, well." He walked out to the study, his shoulders bent like they were under a hodful of cement.

I was still staring at the handkerchief, chewing on a fingernail, when Steve bounced in. He poured himself a cup of coffee, plumped it down on the table and saw the handkerchief.

"Hey," he said. "That's Tatiana's. How did it get here?"

I swallowed what was left of the fingernail and sat down very carefully opposite him. "Steve," I asked, and then stopped because I had to massage my aching stump. "Stevie, you know a girl who owns that handkerchief? A girl named Tatiana?"

"Sure. Tatiana Latianu. See, there are her initials embroidered in the corner—T. L. She's descended from the Rumanian nobility; family goes back about five hundred years. I'm going to marry her."

"She the girl you've been seeing every night for the past month?"

He nodded. "She only goes out at night. Hates the glare of the sun. You know, poetic kind of girl. And Tom, she's so *beautiful* . . ."

For the next hour, I just sat there and listened to him. And I felt sicker and sicker. Because I'm Rumanian myself, on my mother's side. And I knew why I'd been getting those twinges in my stump.

She lived in Brasket Township, about twelve miles away. Tom had run into her late one night on the road when her convertible had broken down. He'd given her a lift to her house—she'd just rented the old Mead Mansion—and he'd fallen for her, hook, line and whole darn fishing rod.

Lots of times, when he arrived for a date, she'd be out, driving around the countryside in the cool night air, and he'd have to play cribbage with her maid, an old beak-faced Rumanian biddy, until she got back. Once or twice, he'd tried to go after her in his hot-rod, but that had led to trouble. When she wanted to be alone, she had told him, she wanted to be *alone*. So that was that. He waited for her

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night after night. But when she got back, according to Steve, she really made up for everything. They listened to music and talked and danced and ate strange Rumanian dishes that the maid whipped up. Until dawn. Then he came home.

Steve put his hand on my arm. "Tom, you know that poem—*The Owl and the Pussy-Cat?* I've always thought the last line was beautiful. *'They danced by the light of the moon, the moon, they danced by the light of the moon.'* That's what my life will be like with Tatiana. If only she'll have me. I'm still having trouble talking her into it."

I let out a long breath. "The first good thing I've heard," I said without thinking. "Marriage to *that* girl—"

When I saw Steve's eyes, I broke off. But it was too late.

"What the hell do you mean, Tom: *that* girl? You've never even met her."

I tried to twist out of it, but Steve wouldn't let me. He was real sore. So I figured the best thing was to tell him the truth.

"Stevie. Listen. Don't laugh. Your girl friend is a vampire."

He opened his mouth slowly. "Tom, you're off your—"

"No, I'm not." And I told him about vampires. What I'd heard from my mother who'd come over from the old country, from Transsylvania, when she was twenty. How they can live and have all sorts of strange powers—just so long as they have a feast of human blood once in a while. How the vampire taint is inherited, usually just one child in the family getting it. And how they go out only at night, because sunlight is one of the things that can destroy them.

Steve turned pale at this point. But I went on. I told him about the mysterious epidemic that had hit the kids of Groppa County—and made them anemic. I told him about his father finding the handkerchief in the Stopes' house, near two of the sickest kids. And I told him—but all of a sudden I was talking to myself. Steve tore out of the kitchen. A second or two later, he was off in the hot-rod.

He came back about eleven-thirty, looking as old as his father. I was right, all right. When he'd wakened Tatiana and asked her straight, she'd broken down and wept a couple of buckets-full. Yes, she was a vampire, but she'd only got the urge a couple of months ago. She'd fought it until her mind began to crack. Then she'd found that she could make herself invisible, when the craving hit her. She'd only touched kids, because she was afraid of grown-ups—they might wake up and be able to catch her. But she'd kind of worked on a lot of kids at one time, so that no one kid would lose too much blood. Only the craving had been getting stronger . . .

And still Steve had asked her to marry him! "There must be a way of curing it," he said. "It's a sickness like any other sickness."

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But she, and—believe me—I thanked God, had said no. She'd pushed him out and made him leave. "Where's Dad?" he asked. "He might know."

I told him that his father must have left at the same time he did, and hadn't come back yet. So the two of us sat and thought. *And thought.*

When the telephone rang, we both almost fell out of our skins. Steve answered it, and I heard him yelling into the mouthpiece.

He ran into the kitchen, grabbed me by the arm and hauled me out into his hot-rod. "That was Tatiana's maid, Magda," he told me as we went blasting down the highway. "She says Tatiana got hysterical after I left, and a few minutes ago she drove away in her convertible. She wouldn't say where she was going. Magda says she thinks Tatiana is going to do away with herself."

"*Suicide?* But if she's a vampire, how—" And all of a sudden I knew just how. I looked at my watch. "Stevie," I said, "drive to Crispin Junction. And drive like holy hell!"

He opened that hot-rod all the way. It looked at if the motor was going to tear itself right off the car. I remember we went around curves just barely touching the road with the rim of one tire.

We saw the convertible as soon as we entered Crispin Junction. It was parked by the side of one of the three roads that cross the town. There was a tiny figure in a flimsy night-dress standing in the middle of the deserted street. My leg stump felt like it was being hit with a hammer.

The church clock started to toll midnight just as we reached her. Steve leaped out and knocked the pointed piece of wood out of her hands. He pulled her into his arms and let her cry.

I was feeling pretty bad at this point. Because all I'd been thinking of was how Steve was in love with a vampire. I hadn't looked at it from her side. She'd been enough in love with him to try to kill herself the *only* way a vampire could be killed—by driving a stake through her heart on a crossroads at midnight.

And she was a pretty little creature. I'd pictured one of these siren dames: you know, tall, slinky, with a tight dress. A witch. But this was a very frightened, very upset young lady who got in the car and cuddled up in Steve's free arm like she'd taken a lease on it. And I could tell she was even younger than Steve.

So, all the time we were driving back, I was thinking to myself *these kids have got plenty trouble.* Bad enough to be in love with a vampire, but to be a vampire in love with a normal human being . . .

"But how *can* I marry you?" Tatiana wailed. "What kind of home life would we have? And

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Steve, one night I might even get hungry enough to attack *you*!"

The only thing none of us counted on was Doc. Not enough, that is.

Once he'd been introduced to Tatiana and heard her story, his shoulders straightened and the lights came back on in his eyes. The sick children would be all right now. That was most important. And as for Tatiana—

"Nonsense," he told her. "Vampirism might have been an incurable disease in the fifteenth century, but I'm sure it can be handled in the twentieth. First, this nocturnal living points to a possible allergy involving sunlight and perhaps a touch of photophobia. You'll wear tinted glasses for a bit, my girl, and we'll see what we can do with hormone injections. The need for consuming blood, however, presents a somewhat greater problem."

But he solved it.

They make blood in a dehydrated, crystalline form these days. So every night before Mrs. Steven Judd goes to sleep, she shakes some powder into a tall glass of water, drops in an ice-cube or two and has her daily blood toddy. Far as I know, she and her husband are living happily ever after.

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messenger

by . . . Henry Slesar

THE BIG man in the space gear thrust the package towards Gowdy like a shamefaced child.

"What is it?" Gowdy said.

"Nothin' much," the engineer mumbled. He scraped a clumsy hand across the bristle on his cheek. "Got a package from home on the spacer that came in last week. Thought you'd like this. Don't care much for chocolate myself." He looked at the floor.

Gowdy smiled wryly. He took the box from the big man's hands. "Yeah," he said. "I like chocolates. Thanks, Mitch." The words came out dry.

"Ah," Mitch said deprecatingly. He turned in confusion, and clanked out of the room. He left a light trail of desert drift on the steel floor.

Gowdy watched his retreating back with thoughtful eyes. He snapped the string on the package, lifted the lid, and made a creamy selection from the assortment. He chewed on the chocolate dreamily.

I'm a mistress, he thought.

I'm a paramour. These guys treat me like some frowsy blonde with a French poodle and lace on

Gowdy's voice rose. "How'd you like my dirty hands in your brain, mister?"

Henry Slesar is a Creative Director for Robert W. Orr and Associates, an advertising concern whose accounts range from Jergens Lotion to the National Guard Bureau. In between helping influence the thinking of us consumers, Henry Slesar has won recognition as a brilliant newcomer to this field. MESSENGER *is the story of Phil Gowdy, who hates the job he is doing.*

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my bedjacket. He slapped at his fleshy middle. *And I'm getting fat. Soft. A slimy, white-bellied slug . . .*

The idea sickened him suddenly, and he spat the remains of the chocolate violently on the floor. He slammed the lid of the box shut, took it to his locker, and shoved it into a corner.

He paced the floor. "I'll show 'em!" he said aloud. "I'll show 'em!"

He paused at the bookshelves bolted to the wall. His eyes skimmed the titles. He had the cream of the Martian library right there, the rough and tough adventure novels, the mysteries, the sexy romances. More gifts from his admirers, more acknowledgments of their nauseating gratitude . . .

He fingered the binding of one of the books, and almost withdrew it. The idea was tempting. Sprawling on the pneumatic bed, munching on exotic candies, absorbed in the vicarious action of a lean-jawed hero . . . *No!* He shot the book back into the shelf. *Not today!*

He clambered into his uniform, fingers fumbling on the locks. He was still fastening them when he strode out into the gray corridor, stomping along purposefully towards the quarters of the Chief Executive Officer, Harry Storm.

He got his audience quickly.

"What's up, Gowdy?" Storm's dark, worried face struggled with a friendly grin.

"I want work!" Gowdy said.

"What?"

"I want to *do* something, Harry. Something with my hands!"

He thrust them forward. They shook a little. They were pale and smooth, unblistered, the palms soft, the nails clean.

Storm stared at them blankly. "I don't get it."

"What's there to get?" Gowdy said savagely. "I want to *do* some work. I want to get out on the surface. I'll do anything. Irrigation. Mineralogy. Classification. Anything!"

"You've *got* a job, Phil—"

"Nuts!"

"Some of us think it's the most important job on Mars."

Gowdy took the seat in front of the officer's desk. His body went limp, and he looked vacantly at the pile of active communications and orders on the blotter.

"I'm a parasite, Harry," he said weakly.

"Nonsense. You're Morale Officer. That's a big thing on this planet."

"I'm a leech. A guy with one lousy talent—"

The exec regarded him narrowly.

"Phil . . ."

"What?"

"Speak to Norma for me, will you? Find out about the kid. I've been thinking about her letter. Strep throat can be pretty bad in a four-year-old."

"I'll see if I can reach her."

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Gowdy stood up and walked wearily to the doorway. Then he turned and forced a smile. "I'm a messenger boy, Harry. That's the real truth, isn't it?"

"Get Norma for me, Phil. Let her know I'm okay. Ask about the boy."

Gowdy started to say something, but he changed his mind.

"Okay, Harry."

Gowdy went back to his room. He stretched out on the bed and closed his eyes. His hand went out languidly and touched the button that turned on the red light outside the door, the signal that warned off surprise visitors.

He made the connection quickly.

"... told her once I've told her a thousand times ... God, I could scream sometimes! ... kids need a father ... strong hand ... never have time to get my shopping done this afternoon ... better call Judy and have her pick up something for me this afternoon ... Dickie's medicine ... Lord! did Doctor Huston say three times a day or every four hours? ..."

NORMA! NORMA! The voice of Gowdy's brain prodded through the ether.

"... going to school in the morning ... if I can get Elsa to bed before eight ... have to write her teacher ... why must kids get into so much trouble ..."

NORMA! NORMA!

"... what did I forget? What's bothering me? ... Gowdy?"

He enveloped her mind with comforting thoughts and gentle admonitions to concentrate.

"Gowdy ... it must be you ... is Harry all right? (Did I mail the letter?) Tell me about Harry (strong hand) ... Tell me if he's working too hard ..."

Her thoughts and sub-thoughts hit hard at Gowdy's consciousness. Her mind was perturbed; it helped the connection.

He questioned her about Dickie.

"... just a cold, Gowdy, just a cold (what's worse than a kid in bed?) ..., Dickie's all right (strong hand) ... He's feeling much better ... Elsa is fine, too (if she doesn't catch it) ... And Harry? ... What about Harry?"

He assured her of her husband's well-being, but a maverick thought came through, a bitter note from his recent altercation with the executive officer.

"What, Gowdy? ... What's wrong? ..."

He calmed her apprehensions.

"How are you, Gowdy? (There's something wrong, isn't there?) ... Can I send you something (Did I mail that letter?) ... Books, something like that? (Something wrong ...)"

He radiated a thought of contentment.

"... give my love ... got to see about Dickie's medicine ... Elsa's been in an uproar all afternoon (strong hand) ... Goodbye, Gowdy."

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He broke the connection, and opened his eyes.

At rations, an hour later, he told Storm about his wife's message. Storm thanked him. He acknowledged the thanks sullenly, and plowed into his meal.

The food was heavy in his stomach when he went back to his room.

Daniels, the stubby little meteorologist on his first tour of Martian duty, was waiting for him.

"Mr. Gowdy—"

The telepath sighed and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Who do you want, Daniels?"

The little man flushed. He shifted his feet awkwardly, and brushed his hand over the blond wires on his head.

"Well . . . it's a lady."

"It usually is, pal. Wives, mothers, sweethearts. The Gowdy specialty."

Gowdy looked up at him. He wasn't any kid; maybe thirty-four. The late romances were the stickiest.

"She's my girl," the meteorologist said. "We're engaged."

"The first contact's the toughest, you know. Did you forewarn her about this? Some gals get awfully squeamish about a stranger poking around in their mind. It's a little like rape."

The flush deepened, and Daniels looked younger. "Her name's Helen," he said. "Helen Weydon. And I did tell her about—" He paused.

"About the freak messenger on Mars?" Gowdy said. He smiled thinly. "Fastest mail boy in the universe . . ."

"I'd like to find out how she is. The mail spacer's so slow—"

"You don't have to tell me your reasons." He studied the blond man. "How long you been up here, Daniels?"

"Four months."

"Twenty to go. Think she'll wait that long?"

His face dropped, and then he reassembled it. "Sure," he said stoutly. "After we're married, I plan to sign on again. Now that they permit it—"

"The first plan was right," Gowdy scowled. "Mars is no place for family guys. What's that?" He gestured towards the object in Daniels' hand.

"Her picture. I thought it might help." He handed it over.

Gowdy grunted. "Nice-looking."

"Yeah." Daniels smiled for the first time. "She's nice. We been engaged almost a year. Too long . . ."

"It'll take me a while to make contact. It's not an easy job, you know." His voice rose belligerently.

"Sure, I know." Daniels shuffled his feet and smiled lamely. "She's taller than I am," he said.

Gowdy shrugged.

It took him the better part of an hour.

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"... the hell with it ... I'll put up my hair later ... better not wear too much jewelry ... funny how some men associate wantonness with junk jewelry ... new perfume ..."

HELEN WEYDON! HELEN WEYDON!

"... wonder what it would be like? ... older men have something special ... an air ... not that he's so old ... Danny's not much younger ..."

He circled her mind with his thoughts.

"... oh, God, I'm sick ... that thing, that thing ..."

He soothed her, caressing away her revulsion.

"... Gowdy, Gowdy, yes ... (that thing, that thing) ... I was told about you ... Danny (not much younger) ... How is Danny?"

He spoke to her gently, hiding the bitterness in his own subconscious, relating Daniels' concern for her, his yearning for her.

"... yes, yes (it's getting late) ... give him my love ... I miss him (not much younger at all) ... tell him I'm fine (have to hurry) ... will be writing him ..."

He broke the contact carefully, catching one last fleeting thought from the woman's mind.

"... love to Danny (love to Fred) ..."

Gowdy arose from the bed, feeling tired. He lit a cigarette.

"Fred?" he said aloud. Then he frowned.

He found Daniels and told him about the contact. He described it in general terms. He gave no details. What he told the little meteorologist pleased him, and Daniels went off smiling.

It was a month before he saw him again.

It was movie night. They were setting up the silvery-wired cube upon which the images would be thrown when he entered the auditorium. As usual, there were grins and words of casual friendship aimed his way. The men stepped aside for him, creating a path to the front row seat that had become his privilege.

The movie was spectacular. A bronzed hero with icy blue eyes fought off invaders from Neptune. Three women, depicted in luscious fullness on the four-sided screen, pleaded for his affection. The spacemen chuckled at the technical idiocies displayed, but the jeers and whistles evoked by the romantic scenes were edged with tenseness.

He sought out Captain Storm after the show, and Daniels' name came up.

"Good hard worker," Storm told him. "He's a little old for a first tour, but he passed the physical and mental tests okay. There's a kind of OEdipus overcast to his psych performance, but everything averaged out okay."

"Ever get a look at *my* ratings?"

Storm didn't answer.

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"They're pretty good. I can fly any rig built in the last ten years. I can handle any breeder reactor on the planet. I passed the endurance and shock trials at the top ten of my class—"

"I know all about your record, Phil." The captain spoke sharply. "But you're doing the job that fits your capabilities best."

"How do you know?" A blotch of crimson came to Gowdy's white cheeks. "What makes you so sure? You got other telepaths on Earth."

"Nobody with a range like yours, Gowdy. You should be proud."

"Proud?" Gowdy found himself shouting, and a couple of passing spacemen looked at the two men curiously. "You think I'm proud of it, Harry? I was *born* with this rotten talent. I wish I could cut it out—like a tonsil—"

"We all got our cross, Phil." The captain sighed wearily.

"You know what it *costs* a kid to grow up with a freak brain like mine? You think I had it easy? You think you can keep a pal—or a—" He stopped.

"Or a girl?" Storm said gently.

The soft words didn't turn away Gowdy's wrath. He put his florid face close to Storm's.

"You ever feel disgust, Harry? I mean real, sickening, loathsome disgust? Did a telepath ever put his dirty fingers in your brain?"

"You're off base, Phil—"

"Do you know what it's like? Did anyone try it?"

The captain's expression froze. "Don't get ideas, Phil. You know the penalty."

Gowdy's laugh was short. "Sure, I know. Don't worry. I won't pry into that nice filing-cabinet of yours. I got enough enemies on this planet."

"Enemies? You mean friends, Phil."

Gowdy shook his head slowly. "Is that what you think?"

He found Daniels in his room.

"Would you do it again, Mr. Gowdy?" His face was browner, his waist slimmer, his step more confident.

"Helen?"

"Yeah. I still haven't heard from her."

Gowdy remembered his last contact with Daniels' girl, and the memory stirred up curiosity.

"Okay, Freddie," he said, watching him.

Daniels made a face. "Freddie? My name's Lewis. But they call me Danny," he added.

"Funny," Gowdy said. "I thought your name was Fred."

"Naw. Call me Danny."

"Okay, Danny," Gowdy said.

He made the contact. It was easier this time.

". . . gamble away a fortune . . . but I guess he can afford it . . . wonderful, wonderful, never worry about a dollar . . . the twenty-third, the twenty-third . . ."

HELEN! he called to her.

". . . ugh! . . . that thing again . . . watch yourself . . ."

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HELEN WEYDON.

". . . Gowdy? Is it Gowdy (be careful!) . . . ?"

He spoke to her of her lover on Mars.

". . . yes . . . (ugh! that thing!) . . . yes, my love to Danny . . . (no, no, to Fred!) how is Danny . . . is Danny well? (I don't care, you freak, I don't care!) . . ."

He couldn't conceal an emotion of alarm.

". . . what is it? (Who the hell are you?) . . . what's wrong? . . . (it's not your business, freak) . . ."

WHO IS FRED? he asked.

". . . who? (Fred!) . . ."

WHO IS FRED?

". . . a friend (my lover!) . . . someone I know (the twenty-third of May, the twenty-third!) . . . tell Danny I'm all right (married) . . . tell him not to worry (getting married!) . . ."

ARE YOU GETTING MARRIED?

". . . no! (yes!) . . ."

ARE YOU MARRYING FRED?

". . . yes! . . . yes! . . . yes! . . . yes! . . ."

He stunned her, shocked her with a salvo of loathing

". . . get out! get out!" she screamed.

He broke the contact.

Gowdy lay exhausted on the bed after his message was delivered. Then he rose heavily, and summoned Daniels to his room.

This time, he told him everything.

It was two days before Storm found out what had occurred. When he did, he burst into Gowdy's room, breathing shallowly.

"Phil!"

Gowdy tucked a finger in his book and rose to sitting position on the bed. "What's up?"

"Daniels. What did you tell Daniels?"

"Who, me?" Gowdy said innocently. "Nothing—"

"What did you tell him?" Storm towered menacingly. "About his girl. Helen."

"I told him the truth," Gowdy said, going back to his book. He looked up once more when the captain's hand slapped on his shoulder.

"What do you mean, the truth? Why couldn't you confer with me first? Why'd you have to hit him over the head with it?"

"Now, look, Harry." Gowdy spoke patiently. "The guy wanted a message from his girl. Is it my fault it turned out to be a Dear John?"

"It's your fault for telling him! That's not the kind of thing we break to a guy up here. It does things to them—"

"We all got our cross, Captain . . ."

Storm's hand slipped down to Gowdy's collar and bunched the fabric into his fist. "You lousy . . ."

"What?" Gowdy said. "Lousy what, Captain?"

The captain released him with

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a gesture of disgust. He turned and stomped back to the doorway.

"Lousy what, Captain?" Gowdy's voice went up an octave.

"Forget it," Storm said.

"No! I want to know what's on your mind!"

Gowdy's mouth was working uncontrollably. His eyes widened, and before he could check himself, his mind was stabbing towards the captain. His consciousness closed over Storm's, prodding for the answer.

"GET OUT!" Storm screamed. His hands went to his head.

Gowdy retreated, staring at his superior.

"I'm sorry . . ." he whispered.

"I warned you, Phil," Storm said shakily.

He placed him under arrest.

The cell they put him in had been occupied only once before, by an overly bored astronaut who had dosed himself with too much oxygen. He had left his mark there, a message scratched on the wall with the sharp side of a spoon. It read: "MARS IS HELL."

There wasn't any view; the cell was located on Second Level of the Earth stronghold on the planet. Gowdy was accustomed to the isolation, but the lack of reading matter hurt.

He tried to have some words with the young sentry they put on duty outside. The attempt was fruitless. The story had made the rounds, and even the Desert Dogs, the spacemen plowing around the tricky dunes on the surface of the planet, would have heard by now that Gowdy had committed the one intolerable offense.

By the time the long Martian day was over, he was conscious of a greater loneliness than he had ever known before.

He slept, and he had a nightmare.

He dreamt he was alone in the void. He was wearing space gear, but the air was close inside his helmet, and his breath was rasping. He could see the soft glow of Deimos to his right, but the planet Mars was nowhere in evidence. He was floating, freely, a sattelite of flesh and bone. He kicked hard, but the effort wasn't enough to turn his captured body.

Then he saw the ship, a white speck coming towards him. It loomed larger with every passing second. He cried out, voicelessly. The ship came closer still.

Then he saw that it wasn't a ship at all. It was a brain—a white convoluted mass destined to overwhelm him—

"GOWDY!" it cried.

The voice was Storm's. Gowdy opened his eyes and batted the captain's hand away from its painful grip on his arm.

"You might like to know," Storm was saying.

"What? What is it?"

"Daniels." Gowdy had never heard such steel in the captain's tone before. "Daniels is gone. We

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missed him at bedcheck. The Shuttle's gone, too."

"What do you want from me?"

"I just want you to know, Gowdy. Daniels is no pilot. He's had mock experience in school, but that's all. The robot controls can just do so much. And he won't respond to our radio signal."

"Why blame me?" Gowdy said furiously. "He was a nut. A psycho!"

"We don't judge that, Gowdy. We work with anybody the department sends. Work *with* 'em, understand. Not against them!"

"He would have gone off his rocker anyway," Gowdy said hastily, the words tumbling out. "He wasn't stable . . ."

The captain looked contemptuous. "Look who's talking—" He went to the doorway.

"Wait," Gowdy said.

"Why?"

"Look, Harry." Gowdy's hand went out. "I'm sorry. Don't you see that?"

"I see a reactor exploding in space," Storm said tightly. "At least, I *hope* it's space."

"Harry!"

The captain went out.

Gowdy found that he could cry.

He felt the moisture on his cheek and touched it with his hand, wonderingly. It had been a long time. He'd learned to bottle up the tears when he was a kid, letting them drip, drip inside him like a rainfall of vinegar, turning something sour in his ego.

He looked at the scratched sign on the wall.

" 'Mars is hell'," he said aloud. "You poor slob . . ."

He thought of Helen Weydon, and he cursed.

He thought of a girl back on Earth, a slim, shadowy thing with a name he had forgotten, and a silvery laugh he remembered too well.

Then he thought of Daniels.

"Why not?" he said. His hands clasped together suddenly. "Why not?"

He leaned back on the bunk.

". . . oh, God, God . . . what did I do wrong? . . . regret it . . . she'll regret it . . . I'll . . . no, no, I won't . . . Helen, Helen . . ."

DANIELS!

". . . ugh! . . . I've got the shakes . . . lonely, it's so lonely . . . night . . . always night . . ."

DANIELS!

". . . they'll think I'm crazy . . . am I? . . . orbital velocity . . . gravitational compensator . . . what does it mean? . . . it's different . . . different . . ."

DANIELS! LISTEN!

". . . no, no! . . . get out, out! . . . Gowdy! (Oh, God!) . . . get out . . . you freak, you freak . . ."

GIVE ME YOUR POSITION.

". . . no! Going back . . . Helen (your fault) . . . get to . . . get back to Earth . . ."

YOU WON'T MAKE IT.

". . . yes . . . must . . . get out."

His thoughts were weak, and Gowdy almost lost contact.

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YOUR SHIP CAN'T TAKE IT. YOUR SUPPLIES WON'T HOLD OUT. IT'S MONTHS, DANIELS. MONTHS.

Feebly: *". . . get out . . . get out."*

GIVE ME YOUR POSITION.

No reply. Gowdy became frightened. Even the subconscious jumble of Daniels' thoughts were lost to him.

Then:

". . . my reading . . . velocity 6550 from Mars . . . earth-sun line 54 degrees . . . mars-sun line 24 degrees . . ."

DANIELS. DO YOU KNOW WHERE THE GYROSCOPIC CONTROL IS?

". . . yes . . ."

YOU MUST TURN THE SHIP. YOU MUST TURN.

". . . no (punishment) . . . I can't . . ."

SET YOUR CONTROL FOR A 12-DEGREE TURN. WE'LL BRING YOU IN FROM THE LANDING STATION. USE YOUR RADIO.

". . . . no! I won't! . . . going back (Helen!) . . ."

Gowdy's brain was drumming.

THINK OF YOUR MOTHER, DANIELS.

". . . crazy . . . what are you saying? . . . think I'm a child? (Oh, God, help me!) . . . mother! . . . get out of this, Gowdy (ma! ma!) . . ."

WE WANT YOU BACK.

". . . no, no, can't come back (Ma! Help me!) . . ."

The communication grew fuzzy. Gowdy struggled to maintain his touch with the meteorologist's confused mind patterns. Then:

". . . . all right . . . all right . . . (ma!) . . . can't do anything else . . . turning back . . . coming back now . . ."

Gratefully, Gowdy let the contact break.

It was some minutes before Gowdy could control the dizziness that beset him after his bout with the man in the Shuttle. He reeled off his bunk, and fell against the door of his prison. Through the small barred aperture, he could see the close-cropped hair at the nape of the young sentry's neck.

"Hey." His voice was weak. "Hey, Junior."

The guard didn't move.

"I've got to see Captain Storm. Right away. It's about Daniels in the Shuttle—"

Not a flicker.

"Please!" Gowdy's voice rose. "I'm serious!" Then his tone became commanding. "How'd you like my dirty hands in *your* brain, mister?"

The sentry turned, white-faced. He swallowed hard, and left.

An hour after the Shuttle ship was safely anchored to the concrete landing platform, Phil Gowdy was released from his cell. And an hour after that, he had a visitor. It was Storm.

"Nothing much I can say about this, Phil," the captain said. "Except, thanks, maybe."

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"Forget it."

"The men like Daniels. They appreciate what you did. I thought you ought to know that."

"Yeah. He's a great guy. Daniels."

"They could like you, too, Phil."

"Sure . . ."

"All they need is the chance."

Gowdy looked up, a piece of chocolate halfway to his mouth. He held it there.

"Why shouldn't they like me? I'm Mister Home and Hearth . . ."

The captain sat on the bunk. "That's what you don't understand, Phil. That's what you've never understood. And that's what's been eating you—not the job—"

"Now, look—"

"You just want to be liked, Phil. That's the whole trouble. You want acceptance, like everybody else."

"Nuts!"

The captain's face was thoughtful. He got up from the bed and walked to the door, while Gowdy chewed mechanically on the candy in his mouth.

Then he turned.

"I got a message for you, from the men. Want to hear it?"

Gowdy shrugged.

"They wanted me to tell you. Any time you feel like poking around in their brain to see what they *really* think—you can do it."

Gowdy stopped chewing. He swallowed the remains of the chocolate, and it choked him.

"It's the truth, Phil. You can start right now. With me."

Gowdy looked at the wall. "No, thanks."

The captain opened the door.

"Harry—"

"What?"

"Get rid of this for me, will you?" Gowdy handed him the box of candy. "I hate chocolate."

"Sure," the captain said. He left without a smile. No smile was necessary.

IN THIS MONTH'S *SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE*—

THE CAREFUL TERRORIST
by Leslie Charteris

PROBLEM AT POLLENSA BAY
by Agatha Christie

WINGS OF DEATH
by Christopher Bush

THE PLASTER CAT
by Q. Patrick

THE DAY OF THE CRIPPLES
by Vincent Starrett

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where hesperus falls

by . . . Jack Vance

Revere had lived so long that his every waking hour was a nightmare. And nightmares encourage primitive behavior.

MY SERVANTS will not allow me to kill myself. I have sought self-extinction by every method, from throat-cutting to the intricate routines of Yoga, but so far they have thwarted my most ingenious efforts.

I grow ever more annoyed. What is more personal, more truly one's own, than a man's own life? It is his basic possession, to retain or relinquish as he sees fit. If they continue to frustrate me, someone other than myself will suffer. I guarantee this.

My name is Henry Revere. My appearance is not remarkable, my intelligence is hardly noteworthy, and my emotions run evenly. I live in a house of synthetic shell, decorated with wood and jade, and surrounded by a pleasant garden. The view to one side is the ocean, to the other, a valley sprinkled with houses similar to my own. I am by no means a prisoner, although my servants supervise me with the most minute care. Their first concern is to prevent my suicide, just as mine is to achieve it.

It is a game in which they have all the advantages—a detailed knowledge of my psychology, corridors behind the walls from which they can observe me, and a host

Jack Vance comes up this time with a neo-Freudian masterpiece. This isn't quite the Earth you may know. A strange story—that you will remember for years.

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of technical devices. They are men of my own race, in fact of my own blood. But they are immeasurably more subtle than I.

My latest attempt was clever enough—although I had tried it before without success. I bit deeply into my tongue and thought to infect the cut with a pinch of garden loam. The servants either noticed me placing the soil in my mouth or observed the tension of my jaw.

They acted without warning. I stood on the terrace, hoping the soreness in my mouth might go undetected. Then, without conscious hiatus, I found myself reclining on a pallet, the dirt removed, the wound healed. They had used a thought-damping ray to anaesthetize me, and their sure medical techniques, aided by my almost invulnerable constitution, defeated the scheme.

As usual, I concealed my annoyance and went to my study. This is a room I have designed to my own taste, as far as possible from the complex curvilinear style which expresses the spirit of the age.

Almost immediately the person in charge of the household entered the room. I call him Dr. Jones because I cannot pronounce his name. He is taller than I, slender and fine-boned. His features are small, beautifully shaped, except for his chin which to my mind is too sharp and long, although I understand that such a chin is a contemporary criterion of beauty. His eyes are very large, slightly protuberant; his skin is clean of hair, by reason both of the racial tendency toward hairlessness, and the depilation which every baby undergoes upon birth.

Dr. Jones' clothes are vastly fanciful. He wears a body mantle of green film and a dozen varicolored disks which spin slowly around his body as an axis. The symbolism of these disks, with their various colors, patterns, and directions of spin, are discussed in a chapter of my *History of Man*—so I will not be discursive here. The disks serve also as gravity deflectors, and are used commonly in personal flight.

Dr. Jones made me a polite salute, and seated himself upon an invisible cushion of anti-gravity. He spoke in the contemporary speech, which I could understand well enough, but whose nasal trills, gutturals, sibilants and indescribable fricatives, I could never articulate.

"Well, Henry Revere, how goes it?" he asked.

In my pidgin-speech I made a non-committal reply.

"I understand," said Dr. Jones, "that once again you undertook to deprive us of your company."

I nodded. "As usual I failed," I said.

Dr. Jones smiled slightly. The race had evolved away from laughter, which, as I understand, originated in the cave-man's bellow of relief at the successful clubbing of an adversary.

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"You are self-centered," Dr. Jones told me. "You consider only your own pleasure."

"My life is my own. If I want to end it, you do great wrong in stopping me."

Dr. Jones shook his head. "But you are not your own property. You are the ward of the race. How much better if you accepted this fact!"

"I can't agree," I told him.

"It is necessary that you so adjust yourself." He studied me ruminatively. "You are something over ninety-six thousand years old. In my tenure at this house you have attempted suicide no less than a hundred times. No method has been either too crude or too painstaking."

He paused to watch me but I said nothing. He spoke no more than the truth, and for this reason I was allowed no object sharp enough to cut, long enough to strangle, noxious enough to poison, heavy enough to crush—even if I could have escaped surveillance long enough to use any deadly weapon.

I was ninety-six thousand, two hundred and thirty-two years old, and life long ago had lost that freshness and anticipation which makes it enjoyable. I found existence not so much unpleasant, as a bore. Events repeated themselves with a deadening familiarity. It was like watching a rather dull drama for the thousandth time: the boredom becomes almost tangible and nothing seems more desirable than oblivion.

Ninety-six thousand, two hundred and two years ago, as a student of bio-chemistry, I had offered myself as a guinea pig for certain tests involving glands and connective tissue. An incalculable error had distorted the experiment, with my immortality as the perverse result. To this day I appear not an hour older than my age at the time of the experiment, when I was so terribly young.

Needless to say, I suffered tragedy as my parents, my friends, my wife, and finally my children grew old and died, while I remained a young man. So it has been. I have seen untold generations come and go; faces flit before me like snowflakes as I sit here. Nations have risen and fallen, empires extended, collapsed, forgotten. Heroes have lived and died; seas drained, deserts irrigated, glaciers melted, mountains levelled. Almost a hundred thousand years I have persisted, for the most part effacing myself, studying humanity. My great work has been the *History of Man.*

Although I have lived unchanging, across the years the race evolved. Men and women grew taller, and more slender. Every century saw features more refined, brains larger, more flexible. As a result, I, Henry Revere, *homo sapiens* of the twentieth century, today am a freakish survival, somewhat more advanced than the

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Neanderthal, but essentially a precursor to the true Man of today.

I am a living fossil, a curio among curios, a public ward, a creature denied the option of life or death. This was what Dr. Jones had come to explain to me, as if I were a retarded child. He was as kindly as he knew how, but unusually emphatic. Presently he departed and I was left to myself, in whatever privacy the scrutiny of half a dozen pairs of eyes allows.

It is harder to kill one's self than one might imagine. I have considered the matter carefully, examining every object within my control for lethal potentialities. But my servants are preternaturally careful. Nothing in this house could so much as bruise me. And when I leave the house, as I am privileged to do, gravity deflectors allow me no profit from high places, and in this exquisitely organized civilization there are no dangerous vehicles or heavy machinery in which I could mangle myself.

In the final analysis I am flung upon my own resources. I have an idea. Tonight I shall take a firm grasp on my head and try to break my neck . . .

Dr. Jones came as always, and inspected me with his usual reproach. "Henry Revere, you trouble us all with your discontent. Why can't you reconcile yourself to life as you have always known it?"

"Because I am bored! I have experienced everything. There is no more possibility of novelty or surprise! I feel so sure of events that I could predict the future!"

He was rather more serious than usual. "You are our guest. You must realize that our only concern is to ensure your safety."

"But I don't want safety! Quite the reverse!"

Dr. Jones ignored me. "You must make up your mind to cooperate. Otherwise—" he paused significantly "—we will be forced into a course of action that will detract from the dignity of us all."

"Nothing could detract any further from my dignity," I replied bitterly. "I am hardly better than an animal in a zoo."

"That is neither your fault nor ours. We all must fulfill our existences to the optimum. Today your function is to serve as vinculum with the past."

He departed. I was left to my thoughts. The threats had been veiled but were all too clear. I was to desist from further attempts upon my life or suffer additional restraint.

I went out on the terrace, and stood looking across the ocean, where the sun was setting into a bed of golden clouds. I was beset by a dejection so vast that I felt stifled. Completely weary of a world to which I had become alien, I was yet denied freedom to take my leave. Everywhere I looked were avenues to death: the deep ocean, the heights of the palisade, the glitter of energy in the city. Death

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was a privilege, a bounty, a prize, and it was denied to me.

I returned to my study and leafed through some old maps. The house was silent—as if I were alone. I knew differently. Silent feet moved behind the walls, which were transparent to the eyes above these feet, but opaque to mine. Gauzy webs of artificial nerve tissue watched me from various parts of the room. I had only to make a sudden gesture to bring an anaesthetic beam snapping at me.

I sighed, slumped into my chair. I saw with the utmost clarity that never could I kill myself by my own instrumentality. Must I then submit to an intolerable existence? I sat looking bleakly at the nacreous wall behind which eyes noted my every act.

No, I would never submit. I must seek some means outside myself, a force of destruction to strike without warning: a lightning bolt, an avalanche, an earthquake.

Such natural cataclysms, however, were completely beyond my power to ordain or even predict.

I considered radioactivity. If by some pretext I could expose myself to a sufficient number of roentgens . . .

I sat back in my chair, suddenly excited. In the early days atomic wastes were sometimes buried, sometimes blended with concrete and dropped into the ocean. If only I were able to—but no. Dr. Jones would hardly allow me to dig in the desert or dive in the ocean, even if the radio-activity were not yet vitiated.

Some other disaster must be found in which I could serve the role of a casualty. If, for instance, I had foreknowledge of some great meteor, and where it would strike . . .

The idea awoke an almost forgotten association. I sat up in my chair. Then, conscious that knowledgable minds speculated upon my every expression, I once again slumped forlornly.

Behind the passive mask of my mind was racing, recalling ancient events. The time was too far past, the circumstances obscured. But details could be found in my great *History of Man.*

I must by all means avoid suspicion. I yawned, feigned acute ennui. Then with an air of surly petulance, I secured the box of numbered rods which was my index. I dropped one of them into the viewer, focussed on the molecule-wide items of information.

Someone might be observing me. I rambled here and there, consulting articles and essays totally unrelated to my idea: *The Origin and Greatest Development of the Dithyramb; The Kalmuk Tyrants; New Camelot, 18119 A.D.; Oestheotics; The Caves of Phrygia; The Exploration of Mars; The Launching of the Satellites.* I undertook no more than a glance at this last; it would not be wise to show any more than a flicker of

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interest. But what I read corroborated the inkling which had tickled the back of my mind.

The date was during the twentieth century, during what would have been my normal lifetime.

The article read in part:

Today HESPERUS, *last of the unmanned satellites was launched into orbit around Earth. This great machine will swing above the equator at a height of a thousand miles, where atmospheric resistance is so scant as to be negligible. Not quite negligible, of course; it is estimated that in something less than a hundred thousand years* HESPERUS *will lose enough momentum to return to Earth.*

Let us hope that no citizen of that future age suffers injury when HESPERUS *falls.*

I grunted and muttered. A fatuous sentiment! Let us hope that one person, at the very least, suffers injury. Injury enough to erase him from life!

I continued to glance through the monumental work which had occupied so much of my time. I listened to aquaclave music from the old Poly-Pacific Empire; read a few pages from the Revolt of the Manitobans. Then, yawning and simulating hunger, I called for my evening meal.

Tomorrow I must locate more exact information, and brush up on orbital mathematics.

The *Hesperus* will drop into the Pacific Ocean at Latitude 0° 0′ 0.0″ ± 0.1″, Longitude 141° 12′ 63.9″ ± 0.2″, at 2 hours 22 minutes 18 seconds after standard noon on January 13 of next year. It will strike with a velocity of approximately one thousand miles an hour, and I hope to be on hand to absorb a certain percentage of its inertia.

I have been occupied seven months establishing these figures. Considering the necessary precautions, the dissimulation, the delicacy of the calculations, seven months is a short time to accomplish as much as I have. I see no reason why my calculations should not be accurate. The basic data were recorded to the necessary refinement and there have been no variables or fluctuations to cause error.

I have considered light pressure, hysteresis, meteoric dust; I have reckoned the calendar reforms which have occurred over the years; I have allowed for any possible Einsteinian, Gambade, or Kolbinski perturbation. What is there left to disturb the *Hesperus?* Its orbit lies in the equatorial plane, south of spaceship channels; to all intents and purposes it has been forgotten.

The last mention of the *Hesperus* occurs about eleven thousand years after it was launched. I find a note to the effect that its orbital position and velocity were in exact accordance with theoretical

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values. I believe I can be certain that the *Hesperus* will fall on schedule.

The most cheerful aspect to the entire affair is that no one is aware of the impending disaster but myself.

The date is *January 9.* To every side long blue swells are rolling, rippled with cat's-paws. Above are blue skies and dazzling white clouds. The yacht slides quietly south-west in the general direction of the Marquesas Islands.

Dr. Jones had no enthusiasm for this cruise. At first he tried to dissuade me from what he considered a whim but I insisted, reminding him that I was theoretically a free man and he made no further difficulty.

The yacht is graceful, swift, and seems as fragile as a moth. But when we cut through the long swells there is no shudder or vibration—only a gentle elastic heave. If I had hoped to lose myself overboard, I would have suffered disappointment. I am shepherded as carefully as in my own house. But for the first time in many years I am relaxed and happy. Dr. Jones notices and approves.

The weather is beautiful—the water so blue, the sun so bright, the air so fresh that I almost feel a qualm at leaving this life. Still, now is my chance and I must seize it. I regret that Dr. Jones and the crew must die with me. Still—what do they lose? Very little. A few short years. This is the risk they assume when they guard me. If I could allow them survival I would do so—but there is no such possibility.

I have requested and have been granted nominal command of the yacht. That is to say, I plot the course, I set the speed. Dr. Jones looks on with indulgent amusement, pleased that I interest myself in matters outside myself.

January 12. Tomorrow is my last day of life. We passed through a series of rain-squalls this morning, but the horizon ahead is clear. I expect good weather tomorrow.

I have throttled down to Dead-Slow, as we are only a few hundred miles from our destination.

January 13. I am tense, active, charged with vitality and awareness. Every part of me tingles. On this day of my death it is good to be alive. And why? Because of anticipation, eagerness, hope.

I am trying to mask my euphoria. Dr. Jones is extremely sensitive; I would not care to start his mind working at this late date.

The time is noon. I keep my appointment with *Hesperus* in two hours and twenty-two minutes. The yacht is coasting easily over the water. Our position, as recorded by a pin-point of light on the chart, is only a few miles from our final position. At this present rate we will arrive in about two hours and fifteen minutes. Then I will halt the yacht and wait . . .

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The yacht is motionless on the ocean. Our position is exactly at Latitude 0° 0′ 0.0″, Longitude 141° 12′ 63.9.″ The degree of error represents no more than a yard or two. This graceful yacht with the unpronounceable name sits directly on the bull's-eye. There is only five minutes to wait.

Dr. Jones comes into the cabin. He inspects me curiously. "You seem very keyed up, Henry Revere."

"Yes, I feel keyed up, stimulated. This cruise is affording me much pleasure."

"Excellent!" He walks to the chart, glances at it. "Why are we halted?"

"I took it into my mind to drift quietly. Are you impatient?"

Time passes—minutes, seconds. I watch the chronometer. Dr. Jones follows my glance. He frowns in sudden recollection, goes to the telescreen. "Excuse me; something I would like to watch. You might be interested."

The screen depicts an arid waste. "The Kalahari Desert," Dr. Jones tells me. "Watch."

I glance at the chronometer. Ten seconds—they thick off. Five — four — three — two — one. A great whistling sound, a roar, a crash, an explosion! It comes from the telescreen. The yacht rides on a calm sea.

"There went *Hesperus,*" said Dr. Jones. "Right on schedule!"

He looks at me, where I have sagged against a bulkhead. His eyes narrow, he looks at the chronometer, at the chart, at the telescreen, back to me. "Ah, I understand you now! All of us you would have killed!"

"Yes," I mutter, "all of us."

"Aha! You savage!"

I pay him no heed. "Where could I have miscalculated? I considered everything. Loss of entropic mass, lunar attractions—I know the orbit of *Hesperus* as I know my hand. How did it shift, and so far?"

Dr. Jones eyes shine with a baleful light. "You know the orbit of *Hesperus* then?"

"Yes. I considered every aspect."

"And you believe it shifted?"

"It must have. It was launched into an equatorial orbit; it falls into the Kalahari."

"There are two bodies to be considered."

"Two?"

"*Hesperus* and Earth."

"Earth is constant . . . Unchangeable." I say this last word slowly, as the terrible knowledge comes.

And Dr. Jones, for the first time in my memory, laughs, an unpleasant harsh sound. "Constant —unchangeable. Except for libration of the poles. *Hesperus* is the constant. Earth shifts below."

"Yes! What a fool I am!"

"An insensate murdering fool! I see you cannot be trusted!"

I charge him. I strike him once in the face before the anaesthetic beam hits me.

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poor little saturday

by . . . Madeleine L'Engle

The witch woman was very kind to the little boy—very, very kind. . . .

THE WITCH WOMAN lived in a deserted, boarded-up plantation house, and nobody knew about her but me. Nobody in the nosey little town in south Georgia where I lived when I was a boy knew that if you walked down the dusty main street to where the post office ended it, and then turned left and followed that road a piece until you got to the rusty iron gates of the drive to the plantation house, you could find goings on would make your eyes pop out. It was just luck that I found out. Or maybe it wasn't luck at all. Maybe the witch woman wanted me to find out because of Alexandra. But now I wish I hadn't because the witch woman and Alexandra are gone forever and it's much worse than if I'd never known them.

Nobody'd lived in the plantation house since the Civil war when Colonel Londermaine was killed and Alexandra Londermaine, his beautiful young wife, hung herself on the chandelier in the ball room. A while before I was born some northerners bought it but after a few years they stopped coming and people said it was because the house was haunted. Every few

Nobody in the sleepy little town in Southern Georgia knew about the witch woman except the young boy who used to haunt the lonely plantation. Madeleine L'Engle, author of CAMILLA DICKINSON *and other distinguished novels, introduces us to a very lonely woman whom time has passed by. . . .*

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years a gang of boys or men would set out to explore the house but nobody ever found anything, and it was so well boarded up it was hard to force an entrance, so by and by the town lost interest in it. No one climbed the wall and wandered around the grounds except me.

I used to go there often during the summer because I had bad spells of malaria when sometimes I couldn't bear to lie on the iron bedstead in my room with the flies buzzing around my face, or out on the hammock on the porch with the screams and laughter of the other kids as they played torturing my ears. My aching head made it impossible for me to read, and I would drag myself down the road, scuffling my bare sunburned toes in the dust, wearing the tattered straw hat that was supposed to protect me from the heat of the sun, shivering and sweating by turns. Sometimes it would seem hours before I got to the iron gates near which the brick wall was lowest. Often I would have to lie panting on the tall prickly grass for minutes until I gathered strength to scale the wall and drop down on the other side.

But once inside the grounds it seemed cooler. One funny thing about my chills was that I didn't seem to shiver nearly as much when I could keep cool as I did at home where even the walls and the floors, if you touched them, were hot. The grounds were filled with live oaks that had grown up unchecked everywhere and afforded an almost continous green shade. The ground was covered with ferns which were soft and cool to lie on, and when I flung myself down on my back and looked up, the roof of leaves was so thick that sometimes I couldn't see the sky at all. The sun that managed to filter through lost its bright pitiless glare and came in soft yellow shafts that didn't burn you when they touched you.

One afternoon, a scorcher early in September, which is usually our hottest month (and by then you're fagged out by the heat anyhow), I set out for the plantation. The heat lay coiled and shimmering on the road. When you looked at anything through it, it was like looking through a defective pane of glass. The dirt road was so hot that it burned even through my calloused feet and as I walked clouds of dust rose in front of me and mixed with the shimmying of the heat. I thought I'd never make the plantation. Sweat was running into my eyes, but it was cold sweat, and I was shivering so that my teeth chattered as I walked. When I managed finally to fling myself down on my soft green bed of ferns inside the grounds I was seized with one of the worst chills I'd ever had in spite of the fact that my mother had given me an extra dose of quinine that morning and some 666 malaria medicine to boot. I shut my eyes tight and clutched the ferns with my hands and teeth to wait

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until the chill had passed, when I heard a soft voice call:

"Boy."

I thought at first I was delirious, because sometimes I got light-headed when my bad attacks came on; only then I remembered that when I was delirious I didn't know it; all the strange things I saw and heard seemed perfectly natural. So when the voice said, "Boy," again, as soft and clear as the mocking bird at sunrise, I opened my eyes.

Kneeling near me, on the ferns was a girl. She must have been about a year younger than I. I was almost sixteen so I guess she was fourteen or fifteen. She was dressed in a blue and white gingham dress; her face was very pale, but the kind of paleness that's supposed to be, not the sickly pale kind that was like mine showing even under the tan. Her eyes were big and very blue. Her hair was dark brown and she wore it parted in the middle in two heavy braids that were swinging in front of her shoulders as she peered into my face.

"You don't feel well, do you?" she asked. There was no trace of concern or worry in her voice. Just scientific interest.

I shook my head. "No," I whispered, almost afraid that if I talked she would vanish, because I had never seen anyone here before, and I thought that maybe I was dying because I felt so awful, and I thought maybe that gave me the power to see the ghost. But the girl in blue and white checked gingham seemed as I watched her to be good flesh and blood.

"You'd better come with me," she said. "She'll make you all right."

"Who's she?"

"Oh—just Her," she said.

My chill had begun to recede by now, so when she got up off her knees, I scrambled up, too. When she stood up her dress showed a white ruffled petticoat underneath it, and bits of green moss had left patterns on her knees and I didn't think that would happen to the knees of a ghost, so I followed her as she led the way towards the house. She did not go up the sagging, half-rotted steps which led to the veranda about whose white pillars wisteria vines climbed in wild profusion, but went around to the side of the house where there were slanting doors to a cellar. The sun and rain had long since blistered and washed off the paint, but the doors looked clean and were free of the bits of bark from the eucalyptus tree which leaned nearby and which had dropped its bits of dusty peel on either side; so I knew that these cellar stairs must frequently be used.

The girl opened the cellar doors. "You go down first," she said. I went down the cellar steps which were stone, and cool against my bare feet. As she followed me she closed the cellar doors after her and as I reached the bottom of the stairs we were in pitch darkness. I began to be very frightened until

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her soft voice came out of the black.

"Boy, where are you?"

"Right here."

"You'd better take my hand. You might stumble."

We reached out and found each other's hands in the darkness. Her fingers were long and cool and they closed firmly around mine. She moved with authority as though she knew her way with the familiarity born of custom.

"Poor Sat's all in the dark," she said, "but he likes it that way. He likes to sleep for weeks at a time. Sometimes he snores awfully. Sat, darling!" she called gently. A soft, bubbly, blowing sound came in answer, and she laughed happily. "Oh, Sat, you are sweet!" she said, and the bubbly sound came again. Then the girl pulled at my hand and we came out into a huge and dusty kitchen. Iron skillets, pots and pans, were still hanging on either side of the huge stove, and there was a rolling pin and a bowl of flour on the marble topped table in the middle of the room. The girl took a lighted candle off the shelf.

"I'm going to make cookies," she said as she saw me looking at the flour and the rolling pin. She slipped her hand out of mine. "Come along." She began to walk more rapidly. We left the kitchen, crossed the hall, went through the dining room, its old mahogany table thick with dust although sheets covered the pictures on the walls. Then we went into the ball room. The mirrors lining the walls were spotted and discolored; against one wall was a single delicate gold chair, its seat cushioned with pale rose and silver woven silk; it seemed extraordinarily well preserved. From the ceiling hung the huge chandelier from which Alexandra Londermaine had hung herself, its prisms catching and breaking up into a hundred colors the flickering of the candle and the few shafts of light that managed to slide in through the boarded-up windows. As we crossed the ball room the girl began to dance by herself, gracefully, lightly, so that her full blue and white checked gingham skirts flew out around her. She looked at herself with pleasure in the old mirrors as she danced, the candle flaring and guttering in her right hand.

"You've stopped shaking. Now what will I tell Her?" she said as we started to climb the broad mahogany staircase. It was very dark so she took my hand again, and before we had reached the top of the stairs I obliged her by being seized by another chill. She felt my trembling fingers with satisfaction. "Oh, you've started again. That's good." She slid open one of the huge double doors at the head of the stairs.

As I looked in to what once must have been Colonel Londermaine's study I thought that surely what I saw was a scene in a dream or a vision in delirium. Seated at the huge table in the center of the room

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was the most extraordinary woman I had ever seen. I felt that she must be very beautiful, although she would never have fulfilled any of the standards of beauty set by our town. Even though she was seated I felt that she must be immensely tall. Piled up on the table in front of her were several huge volumes, and her finger was marking the place in the open one in front of her, but she was not reading. She was leaning back in the carved chair, her head resting against a piece of blue and gold embroidered silk that was flung across the chair back, one hand gently stroking a faun that lay sleeping in her lap. Her eyes were closed and somehow I couldn't imagine what color they would be. It wouldn't have surprised me if they had been shining amber or the deep purple of her velvet robe. She had a great quantity of hair, the color of mahogany in firelight, which was cut quite short and seemed to be blown wildly about her head like flame. Under her closed eyes were deep shadows, and lines of pain about her mouth. Otherwise there were no marks of age on her face but I would not have been surprised to learn that she was any age in the world—a hundred, or twenty-five. Her mouth was large and mobile and she was singing something in a deep, rich voice. Two cats, one black, one white, were coiled up, each on a book, and as we opened the doors a leopard stood up quietly beside her, but did not snarl or move. It simply stood there and waited, watching us.

The girl nudged me and held her finger to her lips to warn me to be quiet, but I would not have spoken —could not, anyhow, my teeth were chattering so from my chill which I had completely forgotten, so fascinated was I by this woman sitting back with her head against the embroidered silk, soft deep sounds coming out of her throat. At last these sounds resolved themselves into words, and we listened to her as she sang. The cats slept indifferently, but the leopard listened, too:

I sit high in my ivory tower,
The heavy curtains drawn.
I've many a strange and lustrous flower,
A leopard and a fawn

Together sleeping by my chair
And strange birds softly winging,
And ever pleasant to my ear
Twelve maidens' voices singing.

Here is my magic maps' array,
My mystic circle's flame.
With symbol's art He lets me play,
The unknown my domain,

And as I sit here in my dream
I see myself awake,
Hearing a torn and bloody scream,
Feeling my castle shake . . .

Her song wasn't finished but she

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opened her eyes and looked at us. Now that his mistress knew we were here the leopard seemed ready to spring and devour me at one gulp, but she put her hand on his sapphire-studded collar to restrain him.

"Well, Alexandra," she said, "Who have we here?"

The girl, who still held my hand in her long, cool fingers, answered, "It's a boy."

"So I see. Where did you find him?"

The voice sent shivers up and down my spine.

"In the fern bed. He was shaking. See? He's shaking now. Is he having a fit?" Alexandra's voice was filled with pleased interest.

"Come here, boy," the woman said.

As I didn't move, Alexandra gave me a push, and I advanced slowly. As I came near, the woman pulled one of the leopard's ears gently, saying, "Lie down, Thammuz." The beast obeyed, flinging itself at her feet. She held her hand out to me as I approached the table. If Alexandra's fingers felt firm and cool, hers had the strength of the ocean and the coolness of jade. She looked at me for a long time and I saw that her eyes were deep blue, much bluer than Alexandra's, so dark as to be almost black. When she spoke again her voice was warm and tender: "You're burning up with fever. One of the malaria bugs?" I nodded. "Well, we'll fix that for you."

When she stood and put the sleeping faun down by the leopard, she was not as tall as I had expected her to be; nevertheless she gave an impression of great height. Several of the bookshelves in one corner were emptied of books and filled with various shaped bottles and retorts. Nearby was a large skeleton. There was an acid stained wash basin, too; that whole section of the room looked like part of a chemist's or physicist's laboratory. She selected from among the bottles a small amber colored one, and poured a drop of the liquid it contained into a glass of water. As the drop hit the water there was a loud hiss and clouds of dense smoke arose. When it had drifted away she handed the glass to me and said, "Drink. Drink, my boy!"

My hand was trembling so that I could scarcely hold the glass. Seeing this, she took it from me and held it to my lips.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Drink it," she said, pressing the rim of the glass against my teeth. On the first swallow I started to choke and would have pushed the stuff away, but she forced the rest of the burning liquid down my throat. My whole body felt on fire. I felt flame flickering in every vein and the room and everything in it swirled around. When I had regained my equilibrium to a certain extent I managed to gasp out again, "What is it?"

She smiled and answered,

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"Nine peacocks' hearts, four bats' tongues,
A pinch of moondust and a hummingbird's lungs."

Then I asked a question I would never have dared ask if it hadn't been that I was still half drunk from the potion I had swallowed, "Are you a witch?"

She smiled again, and answered, "I make it my profession.

Since she hadn't struck me down with a flash of lightning, I went on. "Do you ride a broomstick?"

This time she laughed. "I can when I like."

"Is it—is it very hard?"

"Rather like a bucking bronco at first, but I've always been a good horsewoman, and now I can manage very nicely. I've finally progressed to side-saddle, though I still feel safer astride. I always rode my horse astride. Still, the best witches ride side saddle, so . . . Now run along home. Alexandra has lessons to study and I must work. Can you hold your tongue or must I make you forget?"

"I can hold my tongue."

She looked at me and her eyes burnt into me like the potion she had given me to drink. "Yes, I think you can," she said. "Come back tomorrow if you like. Thammuz will show you out.'

The leopard rose and led the way to the door. As I hesitated, unwilling to tear myself away, it came back and pulled gently but firmly on my trouser leg.

"Good-bye, boy," the witch woman said. "And you won't have any more chills and fever."

"Good-bye," I answered. I didn't say thank you. I didn't say good-bye to Alexandra. I followed the leopard out.

She let me come every day. I think she must have been lonely. After all I was the only thing there with a life apart from hers. And in the long run the only reason I have had a life of my own is because of her. I am as much a creation of the witch woman's as Thammuz the leopard was, or the two cats, Ashtaroth and Orus (it wasn't until many years after the last day I saw the witch woman that I learned that those were the names of the fallen angels).

She did cure my malaria, too. My parents and the townspeople thought that I had outgrown it. I grew angry when they talked about it so lightly and wanted to tell them that it was the witch woman, but I knew that if ever I breathed a word about her I would be eternally damned. Mamma thought we should write a testimonial letter to the 666 Malaria Medicine people, and maybe they'd send us a couple of dollars.

Alexandra and I became very good friends. She was a strange, aloof creature. She liked me to watch her while she danced alone in the ball room or played on an imaginary harp—though sometimes I fancied I could hear the music. One day she took me into the

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drawing room and uncovered a portrait that was hung between two of the long boarded up windows. Then she stepped back and held her candle high so as to throw the best light on the picture. It might have been a picture of Alexandra herself, or Alexandra as she might be in five years.

"That's my mother," she said. "Alexandra Londermaine."

As far as I knew from the tales that went about town, Alexandra Londermaine had given birth to only one child, and that still-born, before she had hung herself on the chandelier in the ball room—and anyhow, any child of hers would have been Alexandra's mother or grandmother. But I didn't say anything because when Alexandra got angry she became ferocious like one of the cats, and was given to leaping on me, scratching and biting. I looked at the portrait long and silently.

"You see, she has on a ring like mine," Alexandra said, holding out her left hand, on the fourth finger of which was the most beautiful sapphire and diamond ring I had ever seen, or rather, that I could ever have imagined, for it was a ring apart from any owned by even the most wealthy of the townsfolk. Then I realized that Alexandra had brought me in here and unveiled the portrait simply that she might show me the ring to better advantage, for she had never worn a ring before.

"Where did you get it?"

"Oh, she got it for me last night."

"Alexandra," I asked suddenly, "how long have you been here?"

"Oh, a while."

"But how long?"

"Oh, I don't remember."

"But you must remember."

"I don't. I just came—like Poor Sat."

"Who's Poor Sat?" I asked, thinking for the first time of whoever it was that had made the gentle bubbly noises at Alexandra the day she found me in the fern bed.

"Why, we've never shown you Sat, have we!" she exclaimed. "I'm sure it's all right, but we'd better ask Her first."

So we went to the witch woman's room and knocked. Thammuz pulled the door open with his strong teeth and the witch woman looked up from some sort of experiment she was making with test tubes and retorts. The fawn, as usual, lay sleeping near her feet. "Well?" she said.

"Is it all right if I take him to see Poor Little Saturday?" Alexandra asked her.

"Yes, I suppose so," she answered. "But no teasing," and turned her back to us and bent again over her test tubes as Thammuz nosed us out of the room.

We went down to the cellar. Alexandra lit a lamp and took me back to the corner furthest from the doors, where there was a stall. In the stall was a two-humped

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camel. I couldn't help laughing as I looked at him because he grinned at Alexandra so foolishly, displaying all his huge buck teeth and blowing bubbles through them.

"She said we weren't to tease him," Alexandra said severely, rubbing her cheek against the preposterous splotchy hair that seemed to be coming out, leaving bald pink spots of skin on his long nose.

"But what—" I started.

"She rides him sometimes." Alexandra held out her hand while he nuzzled against it, scratching his rubbery lips against the diamond and sapphire of her ring. "Mostly She talks to him. She says he is very wise. He goes up to Her room sometimes and they talk and talk. I can't understand a word they say. She says it's Hindustani and Arabic. Sometimes I can remember little bits of it, like: *iderow, sorcabatcha,* and *anna bihed bech.* She says I can learn to speak with them when I finish learning French and Greek."

Poor Little Saturday was rolling his eyes in delight as Alexandra scratched behind his ears. "Why is he called Poor Little Saturday?" I asked.

Alexandra spoke with a ring of pride in her voice. "I named him. She let me."

"But why did you name him that?"

"Because he came last winter on the Saturday that was the shortest day of the year, and it rained all day so it got light later and dark earlier than it would have if it had been nice, so it really didn't have as much of itself as it should, and I felt so sorry for it I thought maybe it would feel better if we named him after it . . . She thought it was a nice name!" she turned on me suddenly.

"Oh, it is! It's a fine name!" I said quickly, smiling to myself as I realized how much greater was this compassion of Alexandra's for a day than any she might have for a human being. "How did She get him?" I asked.

"Oh, he just came."

"What do you mean?"

"She wanted him so he came. From the desert."

"He *walked!*"

"Yes. And swam part of the way. She met him at the beach and flew him here on the broom stick. You should have seen him. She was still all wet and looked so funny. She gave him hot coffee with things in it."

"What things?"

"Oh, just things."

Then the witch woman's voice came from behind us. "Well, children?"

It was the first time I had seen her out of her room. Thammuz was at her right heel, the fawn at her left. The cats, Ashtaroth and Orus, had evidently stayed upstairs. "Would you like to ride Saturday?" she asked me.

Speechless, I nodded. She put her hand against the wall and a

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portion of it slid down into the earth so that Poor Little Saturday was free to go out. "She's sweet, isn't she?" the witch woman asked me, looking affectionately at the strange, bumpy-kneed, splay-footed creature. "Her grandmother was very good to me in Egypt once. Besides, I love camel's milk."

"But Alexandra said she was a he!" I exclaimed.

"Alexandra's the kind of woman to whom all animals are he except cats, and all cats are she. As a matter of fact, Ashtaroth and Orus are she, but it wouldn't make any difference to Alexandra if they weren't. Go on out, Saturday. Come on!"

Saturday backed out, bumping her bulging knees and ankles against her stall, and stood under a live oak tree. "Down," the witch woman said. Saturday leered at me and didn't move. "Down, sorcabatcha!" the witch woman commanded, and Saturday obediently got down on her knees. I clambered up onto her, and before I had managed to get at all settled she rose with such a jerky motion that I knocked my chin against her front hump and nearly bit my tongue off. Round and round Saturday danced while I clung wildly to her front hump and the witch woman and Alexandra rolled on the ground with laughter. I felt as though I were on a very unseaworthy vessel on the high seas, and it wasn't long before I felt violently seasick as Saturday pranced among the live oak trees, sneezing delicately.

At last the witch woman called out, "Enough!" and Saturday stopped in her traces, nearly throwing me, and kneeling laboriously. "It was mean to tease you," the witch woman said, pulling my nose gently. "You may come sit in my room with me for a while if you like."

There was nothing I liked better than to sit in the witch woman's room and to watch her while she studied from her books, worked out strange looking mathematical problems, argued with the zodiac, or conducted complicated experiments with her test tubes and retorts, sometimes filling the room with sulphurous odors or flooding it with red or blue light. Only once was I afraid of her, and that was when she danced with the skeleton in the corner. She had the room flooded with a strange red glow and I almost thought I could see the flesh covering the bones of the skeleton as they danced together like lovers. I think she had forgotten that I was sitting there, half hidden in the wing chair, because when they had finished dancing and the skeleton stood in the corner again, his bones shining and polished, devoid of any living trappings, she stood with her forehead against one of the deep red velvet curtains that covered the boarded-up windows and tears streamed down her cheeks. Then she went back to her test tubes and worked feverishly. She never al-

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luded to the incident and neither did I.

As winter drew on she let me spend more and more time in the room. Once I gathered up courage enough to ask her about herself, but I got precious little satisfaction.

"Well, then, are you maybe one of the northerners who bought the place?"

"Let's leave it at that, boy. We'll say that's who I am. Did you know that my skeleton was old Colonel Londermaine? Not so old, as a matter of fact; he was only thirty-seven when he was killed at the battle of Bunker Hill—or am I getting him confused with his great grandfather, Rudolph Londermaine? Anyhow he was only thirty-seven, and a fine figure of a man, and Alexandra only thirty when she hung herself for love of him on the chandelier in the ballroom. Did you know that the fat man with the red mustaches has been trying to cheat your father? His cow will give sour milk for seven days. Run along now and talk to Alexandra. She's lonely."

When the winter had turned to spring and the camellias and azaleas and Cape Jessamine had given way to the more lush blooms of early May, I kissed Alexandra for the first time, very clumsily. The next evening when I managed to get away from the chores at home and hurried out to the plantation, she gave me her sapphire and diamond ring which she had swung for me on a narrow bit of turquoise satin. "It will keep us both safe," she said, "if you wear it always. And then when we're older we can get married and you can give it back to me. Only you mustn't let anyone see it, ever, ever, or She'd be very angry."

I was afraid to take the ring but when I demurred Alexandra grew furious and started kicking and biting and I had to give in.

Summer was almost over before my father discovered the ring hanging about my neck. I fought like a witch boy to keep him from pulling out the narrow ribbon and seeing the ring, and indeed the ring seemed to give me added strength and I had grown, in any case, much stronger during the winter than I had ever been in my life. But my father was still stronger than I, and he pulled it out. He looked at it in dead silence for a moment and then the storm broke. That was the famous Londermaine ring that had disappeared the night Alexandra Londermaine hung herself. That ring was worth a fortune. Where had I got it?

No one believed me when I said I had found it in the grounds near the house—I chose the grounds because I didn't want anybody to think I had been in the house or indeed that I was able to get in. I don't know why they didn't believe me; it still seems quite logical to me that I might have found it buried among the ferns.

It had been a long, dull year, and the men of the town were all

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bored. They took me and forced me to swallow quantities of corn liquor until I didn't know what I was saying or doing. When they had finished with me I didn't even manage to reach home before I was violently sick and then I was in my mother's arms and she was weeping over me. It was morning before I was able to slip away to the plantation house. I ran pounding up the mahogany stairs to the witch woman's room and opened the heavy sliding doors without knocking. She stood in the center of the room in her purple robe, her arms around Alexandra who was weeping bitterly. Overnight the room had completely changed. The skeleton of Colonel Londermaine was gone, and books filled the shelves in the corner of the room that had been her laboratory. Cobwebs were everywhere, and broken glass lay on the floor; dust was inches thick on her work table. There was no sign of Thammuz, Ashtaroth or Orus, or the fawn, but four birds were flying about her, beating their wings against her hair.

She did not look at me or in any way acknowledge my presence. Her arm about Alexandra, she led her out of the room and to the drawing room where the portrait hung. The birds followed, flying around and around them. Alexandra had stopped weeping now. Her face was very proud and pale and if she saw me miserably trailing behind them she gave no notice. When the witch woman stood in front of the portrait the sheet fell from it. She raised her arm; there was a great cloud of smoke; the smell of sulphur filled my nostrils, and when the smoke was gone, Alexandra was gone, too. Only the portrait was there, the fourth finger of the left hand now bearing no ring. The witch woman raised her hand again and the sheet lifted itself up and covered the portrait. Then she went, with the birds, slowly back to what had once been her room, and still I tailed after, frightened as I had never been before in my life, or have been since.

She stood without moving in the center of the room for a long time. At last she turned and spoke to me.

"Well, boy, where is the ring?"

"They have it."

"They made you drunk, didn't they?"

"Yes."

"I was afraid something like this would happen when I gave Alexandra the ring. But it doesn't matter . . . I'm tired . . ." She drew her hand wearily across her forehead.

"Did I—did I tell them everything?"

"You did."

"I—I didn't know."

"I know you didn't know, boy."

"Do you hate me now?"

"No, boy, I don't hate you."

"Do you have to go away?"

"Yes."

"I bowed my head. "I'm so sorry . . ."

She smiled slightly. "The sands

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of time . . . Cities crumble and rise and will crumble again and breath dies down and blows once more . . ."

The birds flew madly about her head, pulling at her hair, calling into her ears. Downstairs we could hear a loud pounding, and then the crack of boards being pulled away from a window.

"Go, boy," she said to me. I stood rooted, motionless, unable to move. "GO!" she commanded, giving me a mighty push so that I stumbled out of the room. They were waiting for me by the cellar doors and caught me as I climbed out. I had to stand there and watch when they came out with her. But it wasn't the witch woman, my witch woman. It was *their* idea of a witch woman, someone thousands of years old, a disheveled old creature in rusty black, with long wisps of gray hair, a hooked nose, and four wiry black hairs springing out of the mole on her chin. Behind her flew the four birds and suddenly they went up, up, into the sky, directly in the path of the sun until they were lost in its burning glare.

Two of the men stood holding her tightly, although she wasn't struggling, but standing there, very quiet, while the others searched the house, searched it in vain. Then as a group of them went down into the cellar I remembered, and by a flicker of the old light in the witch woman's eyes I could see that she remembered, too. Poor Little Saturday had been forgotten. Out she came, prancing absurdly up the cellar steps, her rubbery lips stretched back over her gigantic teeth, her eyes bulging with terror. When she saw the witch woman, her lord and master, held captive by two dirty, insensitive men, she let out a shriek and began to kick and lunge wildly, biting, screaming with the blood-curdling, heart-rending screams that only a camel can make. One of the men fell to the ground, holding a leg in which the bone had snapped from one of Saturday's kicks. The others scattered in terror, leaving the witch woman standing on the veranda supporting herself by clinging to one of the huge wistaria vines that curled around the columns. Saturday clambered up onto the veranda, and knelt while she flung herself between the two humps. Then off they ran, Saturday still screaming, her knees knocking together, the ground shaking as she pounded along. Down from the sun plummeted the four birds and flew after them.

Up and down I danced, waving my arms, shouting wildly until Saturday and the witch woman and the birds were lost in a cloud of dust, while the man with the broken leg lay moaning on the ground beside me.

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universe in books

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

DON'T miss Lester Del Rey's excellent NERVES (Ballantine Books, 35 cents). Described as "an explosive story of danger in a peacetime atomics plant," it is, more than that, an effective story of the impact on these men of threatened disaster. A new and highly unstable radioactive isotope is out of control and—within hours, unless these men succeed—half a continent may be wiped out in the worst peacetime disaster in the atomic age. Del Rey, one of the field's ablest writers, should be remembered for a long time for this portrait of men racing Death in a very near future. Recommended.

M. K. Jessup's THE UFO ANNUAL (Citadel, $4.95) is a compendium of current reports, UFO sightings, and of scientific data relating to UFO either directly or indirectly. It is planned that the UFO Annual "is and will be the nearest thing to date to a 'central clearing house' for any and all UFO reports and investigations."

It is pointed out that this is necessary in order to balance the inability of the Press—deliberate or otherwise—to separate fact from fiction or hoax. A focal point is

FYYING SAUCERS — AND AN EXPLOSIVE NOVEL . . .

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needed for "individual sightings, observations, analyses and even hypotheses." There is need for a UFO Annual, Editor Jessup further points out, "because no other medium is assembling scientific data and discourse pertinent to UFO operations, and making it easily available to all of the people seriously interested in UFO."

The sightings and other reports, day after day, week after week, here and abroad, convincing and less convincing, add up to impressive accumulated evidence of both world interest in *and* obvious existence of what have come to be described as UFO. While Dr. Jessup, also author of *The Case For the UFO,* is, as he admits, often "generous with comment," and has perhaps been a little less than selective in the case of some reports, the result is still an authoritative addition to the material in this field.

Harold Mead's THE BRIGHT PHOENIX (Ballantine Books, 35 cents), is a disturbing excursion into a post-Catastrophe future where an authoritarian state dominates the thinking and the *mores* of the times. Reflecting a somewhat less than optimistic school of thinking within Science Fiction, Mead, an English writer not previously published here, describes a "perfect" State, worshipping at the Shrine of the Human Spirit, the citizens of the State dedicated to the mission of resettling the devastated areas of the world.

The State Hymn says—

"Lead us, Human Spirit, lead us,
To the peace that we would see.
Guide, inspire, condition, feed us
That perfected we may be;
That the world may take redemption
From man manifest in thee."

The difficulty lies in the fact that the human spirit has certain less than admirable qualities.

This world of the Spirit of Man is a strange world of light, of dedication to the "Spirit of Man that alone arose from the ashes of man's folly," and of shadows for the dissenters who "have to be cleansed from the past that still besmires them." John Waterville finds himself in eventual and very definite opposition to this State and to the types created by it. Ballantine Books, who—as I have said in former columns—have repeatedly published interesting and provocative material in this field, have done so with this novel that compares, in stature and tempo, with John Wyndham's REBIRTH. Recommended.

Albro Gaul's, THE COMPLETE BOOK OF SPACE TRAVEL (World, $4.95) is a basic introduction to the problems and facts essential to the world of the day after tomor-

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row, the era of Space Travel. Dealing with the problems space travelers will have to contend with, Gaul discusses the physical and biological conditions within the spaceship in flight, the difficulties to be surmounted in building the ship, the training of the prospective space pilot, and the problems of space travel itself including the very real problems of navigating in space.

The book is illustrated by Virgil Finlay.

Sam Moskowitz's PORTFOLIO OF EARLY SPACESHIPS 1638-1929, a part of the Gaul book, will interest many readers. Former Managing Editor of *Science Fiction Plus,* Moskowitz, has assembled an interesting group of illustrations from the days of Cyrano de Bergerac's famous *Voyage to the Sun,* to Jules Verne and early Gernsback.

Gray Barker's disturbing THEY KNEW TOO MUCH ABOUT FLYING SAUCERS (University Books, $3.50), describes the silencing, one by one, of leading figures among flying saucer researchers who challenge official denials that saucers come from outer space. Three men in dark suits visit one of these researchers, who abruptly withdraws from saucer research. Strange things happen to other researchers. Barker asks WHY?

Perhaps the first book to describe the personalities of the men and women active in Saucer Research. THEY KNEW TOO MUCH ABOUT FLYING SAUCERS will undoubtedly cause a certain amount of discussion. Quite frank in his description of these men and women, Barker also discusses theories of various researchers and possible explanations of much of what has happened. Interesting.

THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER . . .

Even as on Earth the desert-dwelling aborigines perform their rain-making dances, so similarly on wetly steaming Venus the natives perform their dry-making dances. While this may not be "scientific" in the gadget-and-gimmick sense, it's much more picturesque than Venusian machinery, which—due to unfavorable atmospheric conditions—cannot be left exposed, but is covered by protective sheathing and therefore looks somewhat like the dust-catching insides of an early pre-atomic age. The Venusians describe this as *draco-pixll.* . . .

But that's another story. . . .

The girl caught in the swirl (and liking it) is a fair tourist from Earth of course, happily posing for our lensman in the latest (3456 A. D.) touring-costume.

ENJOY VIVACIOUS VACATIONS ON VIVID VENUS!

—Hecticolor Snapimage by Hannes Bok
(Courtesy Interstellar Travel Service)

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daedalus was not a myth

by . . . Ethel Lewis

"Among us there are no dead —only those who have happily reached Completion. . . ."

SARA BEALS, head nurse in Surgery at Watkins General, told herself that she was being foolish. From the age of twenty-one she had assisted great surgeons, and the strain was beginning to tell. A woman of forty-one, she scolded, ought to know better. It was true that she saw Dr. Horton Smith bend over his patient for a matter of some ten seconds, apparently without doing anything, immediately after he had made the large incision.

But for goodness sake, old Dr. Ezra Yates had always cleared his throat like a fog horn before he shot out one of his hands for an instrument from her tray. And Dr. Otis Frank invariably shut his eyes for three seconds before he whispered, "Ready, Beals." Well, Dr. Smith had as much right as any of them to a personal idiosyncrasy.

With this final admonition to herself, Sara was able to put her troubling observations from her mind until the day that Dr. Horton Smith's patient got fully dressed and walked out of the hospital without waiting for his

Nurse Sara Beals had been wondering why Dr. Smith found it necessary to bend over the patient immediately after the first incision was made. Nobody seemed to realize that all four of the patients who'd disappeared had been patients of his. She thought of this and so much more when she finally confronted this man with the gentle voice and . . .

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medical dismissal slip. And also without paying his bill!

Mr. Archer, the Administrator, tried to be patient with Alice Small, day Head in Surgical Ward. "Tell us just what took place, Miss Small."

"We couldn't stop him," Alice said. "Can you stop a tornado?"

"Has he had visitors?" asked Mr. Archer.

"His wife. The first three days. Then he asked could he have a *No Visitors* sign on his door? I thought it was funny but he said that company tired him. I can tell you his wife didn't like it either, but she left finally. Gracious! If he doesn't go home, what will we tell her?"

The patient did not return to his home. His wife brought a lawyer into it, and the hospital had a lawsuit on its hands. When Dr. Smith was informed of the disappearance of his patient, he appeared undisturbed.

"The man may have gone to the home of a relative. Surely, we know nothing of his private life. Possibly, he simply took this opportunity to escape a marriage in which he was not happy."

It was all mystifying and without precedent. The hospital turned the matter over to its own attorneys, and to all concerned the incident was closed. When, however, three times in three months, the same incident, once involving a woman patient, was repeated, the atmosphere at Watkins General became tense. And throughout the excitement and disorder caused, a few of the younger nurses leaving because they were frightened, only Sara Beals seemed to pinpoint the fact that all four had been patients of Dr. Smith's. She spoke of this to no one, since she was not given to gossip and had never mentioned her observation of Dr. Smith's peculiarity at the beginning of an operation. Having always read mystery tales with great enjoyment, Sara determined to do a little detecting herself. She listed the facts she had in her possession:

1. Dr. Horton Smith has done the surgery on all patients who have mysteriously left the hospital.

2. Dr. Smith bends over the patient immediately after the first incision is made.

3. Dr. Smith has made it a practice to pay a midnight call to his patients on the fourth night after surgery.

Sara had learned this third fact on her list from her good friend Theresa Chase who was on the night shift in Surgical. She had a great deal in common with Theresa since they were both past forty, and sensibly resigned to never marrying or having children. Working together at Watkins since their early twenties, they could relax with one another and discuss personalities without fear of being stigmatized by the name of gossip.

"Dr. Smith's a real considerate person," said Theresa. "Not like the others. They want me to pussy-

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foot around after them, you know, they have to act like the big mahoff! Not him. He stops and says good-evening and tells me to keep right on with my reports."

Listening, Sara wondered secretly whether there was significance in the fact that Dr. Smith specifically asked Theresa to stay where she was and not to follow him on his rounds. Well, there was ample room for speculation in the thought and Sara had some exciting inward moments. Still, nothing might have come of her suspicions, if she had been able to avoid showing her increased interest in Dr. Smith.

One morning, about ten o'clock, while Dr. Smith was washing after an appendectomy, he spoke to her as she stood by the instrument sterilizer.

"Miss Beals?" his pleasant voice said.

She turned and found him smiling gently at her. Sweetly, rather. There was a sweetness about his entire personality for that matter. His lanky figure and gaunt face went well together, and for one thing he never looked at you as if he were thinking about ten dozen other more important people or appointments he had to keep.

"Yes, Dr. Smith," she said.

"Would you come to my office this evening?" he asked. "When you go off duty. That would be about four o'clock?"

She nodded. "Yes, Doctor. I'll change into my street clothes first if you don't mind. I'll be there about four-thirty."

It did not occur to her to refuse. And why should she? Here was a man, a charming man at that, an important man who saw her as a woman. It was quite the most thrilling thing that had ever happened to her. She was not pretty and how well she knew it. In recent years she had to depend on small kicks like having a young interne tap her shoulder as he came up behind her in the corridor, and see his eyes pop when she turned.

"Pardon me, Miss Beals. Gee, from behind you look like a student nurse sporting her cap on her first day!"

Her excitement held throughout the day, three demanding operations and three martinet surgeons to please notwithstanding. She knew that Dr. Smith was not married, and her speculations about his strangeness only added to her anticipation. He had to be all right! she told herself. He had come well recommended from a small western hospital some six months ago.

When she knocked on Dr. Smith's office door exactly twenty minutes past four, his voice called, "Come in please."

He was wearing a navy blue suit and a light blue tie, the color reflected in his tired eyes.

"It was good of you to come," he said, coming toward her with both hands out. He held her hands

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for an instant and she felt a great weakness wash over her.

"Won't you sit down?" His voice was close as he placed a chair in the center of the room. He looked at her intently.

She sat down and looked about her. It was a simple square room with a desk and three leather chairs. There were books on wall shelves and on the floor lay a beautiful rug. As she came into the room, she now recalled, her feet had sunk into the thick, enveloping pile. For an instant she felt a peculiar fear as her eyes lighted on a small white sink in a far corner.

"Miss Beals," he was saying. He had sat down at his desk and now studied her across its mahogany expanse.

"Can I . . . can I do anything for you, Dr. Smith?" she asked hesitantly, finding it all at once utterly without reason that he had asked her to his office.

"You may answer a question," he said slowly. "Why are you giving me so much of your attention? Is there something about me which puzzles you?"

Struck dumb by embarrassment, she stared at him.

"Well, Sara?" he asked.

And that startled her. His calling her Sara made her wary.

"I don't mean to be rude, Doctor," she said, summoning all her courage, "but I believe you are just imagining things. Surgery is my chief interest in life. I can't help being interested in the surgeons too."

Slowly Dr. Smith shook his head, and pursed his lips.

"No," he said quietly.

Nervously she stood up, her gloved hands clutching her bag.

"I'm sorry. I'll have to go," she faltered.

"Sit down, Sara," he said.

His voice was not a command, but she resumed her seat. She found suddenly that she could not take her eyes from his.

"We must talk," he went on. There was a new gentleness in his tone, but paradoxically she became more frightened as his voice continued to soothe her. "Some people go through life without awareness. I believe you are one of those gifted with a great awareness."

For an instant, she closed her eyes, wanting the safety of darkness so that she need not look at him. She was in danger. What the nature of that danger was, she had no idea. One thing was certain. She ought not to have come. She could have pleaded an engagement. She ought not to have come. . . .

"Sara, how old are you?"

"Forty-one," she said automatically. Was he going to tell her she was getting too old for her work? Alarm made breathing difficult.

"Young enough," Dr. Smith said reflectively. He was silent for a moment, then turned to draw up a chair. There were no more than three or four feet separating

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them now and she could see the lines in his skin, carving their mark around his eyes and mouth.

None of the hospital sounds penetrated to this room. She felt that the rest of the world had dropped away.

"Really, Dr. Smith," she began, still vaguely troubled.

He raised one of his pale, graceful hands. How well she knew their skill . . .

It was that moment, as the thought of his surgical skill crossed her mind, which brought her with a jar to a sudden realization. All at once she needed no evidence. Never could she dispute him as a surgeon, but as a man he was devious.

"I want to leave," she said decisively.

Strangely, she did not stand. Why didn't she simply get up and walk out? The question tormented her as he allowed the silence to go on.

"You may leave, Sara. If you wish," his warm voice said.

And still she sat. I've got to find out, she told herself.

"You did something," she said slowly. "You did something to each of those patients who left the hospital on their own."

She had expected denial, gracious, unworried, but denial nevertheless. Instead Dr. Smith looked at her thoughtfully.

"You are everything I thought you were," he said with satisfaction. "Sara, there is not another human being in this hospital who connects me with those departures!"

She went cold. He was speaking something she knew but now there were implications. Should anything happen to her, he would not be suspected. And more than that, continued her frantic mind, he can get away whenever he wants.

"What did you do?" she asked. She knew she ought to leave. Now. She ought not wait for his answer. But she waited, and the instant lengthened. He would not have put out a hand to stop her, but she waited.

"I inserted a capsule in the large intestine," he told her with calm.

"A capsule," she gasped.

"Yes," he nodded, his mouth faintly smiling. "The capsule dissolves slowly so that the patient has four days for the healing of his incision."

Four, she repeated voicelessly. There was a key there. On the fourth night, Dr. Smith paid his patients a visit!

"What," she asked, forcing herself to go on, "is in the capsule?"

"The ingredients for change," he said. "You here in this world might call the process induced amnesia. The patient certainly is washed clean of his past because of its introduction into his bloodstream."

She had to take off her gloves, for her hands were so damp and sticky she could not bear the touch of the leather.

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"You deliberately inoculate the patients with something that will wipe out memory?" she was appalled.

"I should like to word it differently. The ingredients create a new consciousness, eager and willing for change."

Her mind fumbled for something he had said a moment before.

"An inoculation," he said matter-of-factly, "would work faster but there would be the difficulty of hiding the instrument before and after. We have in our laboratories perfected the capsule as a wiser if slower means."

"You said . . . 'you here in this world' . . ." her voice dropped as the pounding blood threatened to burst her heart walls. "You here . . . you mean you come from another world!"

"Yes," his voice held a note of sadness. "We are visitors."

"We! There are others like you! Putting capsules into innocent people . . . making them . . ."

He held up both of his hands.

"We do not make people do anything! They wish to work with us."

And now she was standing, her panic a live thing pounding out horror in her ears, drying out her throat so she could not swallow.

"Who are you?"

"I am Director in this city," he said. He stood up but did not approach her. "When I visit the patient upon the fourth night, I transmit to him his key number and his base for orders."

She could not see. Blindly she moved toward the door, but when she was within a foot of it, he spoke.

"You can't go now. Knowing so much, surely you must know all."

She stood still, waiting for her panic to subside. What he said was true. She had to know everything about this man, about his plot, about his 'other world.' If she ran from the room now, and denounced him to Mr. Archer, would he believe her? Poor Sara, Mr. Archer would shake his head regretfully, she's getting too old for her job . . .

The next moment with startling suddenness she had her opportunity for escape and for unmasking Dr. Smith.

There was a knock and Mr. Archer's voice raised in the way one speaks when faced by a door.

"Oh, Dr. Smith? I'm just on my way to the meeting . . . ready?"

Shaking, she stood and watched Dr. Smith rise slowly. She saw that he was completely in command of himself.

"I'm just changing my clothes, Mr. Archer," Dr. Smith said in a slightly higher tone than usual. "Let's say another ten minutes. I'll join you in your office."

"Right!" Mr. Archer's hearty voice answered.

Sara heard his receding footsteps. Why, she asked herself in

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torment, why didn't you rush and open the door and tell Mr. Archer?

"Well, Sara?" To her roaring ears, came Dr. Smith's soothing voice. "You see, you do not want to leave after all. Come here, my dear."

He moved around his desk and stood leaning back against its edge. He held out his hands and in a state of numbness she placed her own into his ready clasp.

"Why have you come here? What do you hope to gain? And," her voice had drained away to a whisper, "what do you want with me?"

"One question at a time," he said gently. He released her fingers. "Sit down, Sara."

Moving backward one step, then another hesitant stumbling step, she felt the chair hit the inside of her knees and she sat down abruptly before she fell. Her hands were damp with perspiration and involuntarily she rubbed the palms on her skirt.

"How many of you are in this country?" she jerked out the question as his long look of appraisal continued.

"About two thousand of us. But we also have three thousand recruits doing our work," he made a graceful gesture. "Such as the four patients with whom I," he cleared his throat delicately, "was able to make contact recently through surgery."

The thunder of her heart had to crack her body wide open, she thought.

"What are you?" she cried. "You're not human!"

His smile was still gentle. "We are human plus, Sara. Our forms are human. Our ways of nourishment and reproduction are human, but we have added abilities. For instance we can contract our bodies so as to enter a crack in a wall no more than a hairs-breadth. Also we have the means within us of exuding through our pores a protective glaze against the sun when in our flight to and from the home planet we feel the sun's fire."

She dropped her face into her hands. "You're not human," she moaned.

She lifted her head and looked into his steady eyes.

"You use planes?" she said in a whisper. "Where do you hide them? Do you come into our own airports?"

His smile was tolerant. "Machinery has no place in our lives, Sara. Each of us can fly. Excepting those of course who choose never to leave home. These are not fitted with the Daedalus equipment."

"Daedalus!" the name burst from her, her mind rioting. "He was a myth! You are a myth. You don't exist . . . or I do not."

"Daedalus was not a myth, my dear. He was far ahead of his own civilization but we, upon our planet, existed long before his time. When the news reached us

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that Daedalus had succeeded with his wings, we honored him by naming our process after him."

"You're a fiend," she sobbed. "A devil. You go around trying to make people go out of their minds! Let me go!"

"I shall not restrain you," he said quietly. "But, Sara, your life can never be resumed as it was before you entered this room. If you leave and do not speak of what I have told you, you will slowly go mad. Not knowing everything about us, you will never find rest or peace or sleep."

She dropped her hands and met his gaze. There was no demon in his eyes, no cruelty.

"Tell me," she pleaded.

"I shall begin with the Daedalus processing since that is our mode of transportation. By free choice we are measured and fitted with magnetic plates in our shoulders and heels to which our wings attach when needed. These fold so minutely that we may carry them easily in our pockets."

"You can't!" she cried suddenly, her mind a turmoil of facts hazily recalled, garnered from some volume she once searched or possibly simply a fact picked up. "If you come from a far off planet, out where the sun is . . . there isn't any air and wings won't carry you!"

"Remember Sara, I said we use wings when needed. When we take off we use only our characteristic of controlled gravitational pull. Later, when we have reached the atmosphere, we attach our wings for a smooth landing."

"But . . ." she could only whisper, "you came to us recommended. With credentials. How . . ."

"Our laboratories are equipped for every contingency," he said calmly. "I served my apprenticeship here on Earth at a small hospital in Idaho. A rugged part of Idaho . . . they don't ask questions in such places where the need of a doctor is great. It was simple of course to obtain written credentials from them . . . Sara, we have little time. I am expected downstairs."

He took a step toward her and she pressed back against the chair.

"Are there . . ." she could barely form the words, "other surgeons here in this hospital . . . like you?"

"No one else in this particular hospital," he shook his head. "But we have doctors placed all through your country. Two in each major city."

In her throat the screams of hysteria were beginning to form. None of this could be happening to her. She was Sara Beals, Assistant in Surgery, forty-one years old, spinster. And everybody knows nothing ever happens to spinsters!

She was on her feet with the thought. If she began to walk out he would not stop her. She took a tentative step and his voice followed her.

"At home, we walk on grass everywhere. Your cement hurts our

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feet through our shoes no matter how thick the soles."

Involuntarily she stopped and looked down. That explained the thickness of his rug. That explained why his movements were full of grace . . . he had always walked on soft, green grass.

She found herself turning to look at him. For the last time, she told herself. I'm going now but I want to see him once more . . .

"Are you leaving, Sara?" he seemed amused, and yet there was no mockery in his voice. Just as there was no smugness in his lie to Mr. Archer a few moments ago.

"It will interest you to know, Sara, that I had the privilege of developing the capsule we are using so successfully here in your land."

"I can't understand," she said painfully, every breath she drew stabbing her chest, "I can't understand what your purpose is. What do we have here that you want?"

"We do not plan conquest," he said, faintly reproachful.

"Go away," she said feverishly, her voice dropping to conspiratorial depth. "Go away now and I won't say a word to anyone. Go back to your own planet and leave us alone!"

"I can't," he said quietly. "We are here to prevent an invasion of our planet. Our agents are placed in key spots in your government to learn of future plans for invasion. We learn about your satellites and your rockets and your space stations." His face saddened. "You see, Sara, we do not want our way of life disturbed. Your people would bring war and hate and disease. And machinery. Machinery is all powerful in your concepts here on Earth. In our civilization the individual is everything. His right to live in peace and fruitfulness is the basis of our way of life. We want no interference."

"But how," she managed to ask in a hoarse whisper, "how can you prevent our government's future plans from being carried out? There will be space travel one day. Why don't you face it . . . instead of . . . instead of . . ."

His eyes seemed lit from within and suddenly his gaze was more than she could bear. The beating of her heart was repeated throughout her whole body with great painful thumps.

"You can help us, Sara," he said, disregarding what she had said. "In our land each man chooses his own field of endeavor and is equipped for top efficiency in that field. In our laboratories our astronomers and chemists and doctors are provided with eyesight perpetual, piercing and infallible. Our farmers and tenders of the grass are equipped with backs and hand which will never tire, being made of the strongest metal ever forged."

Her throat had closed.

"Come to us, Sara," he was coaxing. "You would be invaluable in

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spreading dissension, suspicion and doubt among your planners. We would find a key spot for you right in the Pentagon! After you have been trained by us, you could do the work of your famous Mata Hari!"

Her legs would not move. She tried to move the toes of her feet and found herself powerless.

"Let me go," she said in a wooden voice. And as she spoke the words, she felt the pull toward him, the magnetism and the force.

"You do not want to go, Sara. You could do vital work . . . set back the plans of your government by possibly a hundred years! Or," he cocked his head on one side and studied her. "Possibly you should prefer being equipped for a journey to the home planet. On Euphoria, there is no aging process, Sara. On Euphoria, we have no unhappy, childless women . . ."

"Stop . . ." she choked out the word, looking down with an impersonal detachment as she wrung her hands.

"At birth," he continued, "each infant is inoculated for one hundred years of fruitful living. Change in our physical appearance stops at the age of twenty-five," he rubbed his chin. "I have been on Earth for eight years and the toll is great. I am but thirty-four but I appear to have passed half a century. How vastly different it is at home. Think of a life without fatigue or pain. At the end of one hundred years, each individual is found in his bed, at peace and without consciousness. Only then when his breathing has stopped is there outward change. Since his encasement of vigor and firm flesh is no longer of use, the sheath shrivels and creases as befits one who is Completed. Among us, Sara, there are no dead. Only those who have happily reached Completion."

There was a mist before her eyes. He knew that she had always feared old age and loneliness and the special loneliness of dying in the knowledge there was no one to shed tears on her passing away . . .

"Why do I stay here and listen to you?" she cried.

"You are perceptive," he said. "You know that I may have a message of importance for you. We do not wish a great exodus of our people to do this prevention work for us. The purpose of recruiting is to make possible our retaining of our population on Euphoria. Many are fearful of leaving the home land, you see. You might take on the task of dispelling fear of Earth. Should our needs grow greater, and the difficulties of recruiting increase, possibly you can persuade a number of Euphorians to migrate. Oh, there would be much for you to do, Sara. And if you choose to remain here as a recruit, you would be excellent as a floating agent."

"A floating agent," she repeated

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tonelessly. It was as if all intelligence had been drained from her mind. She was a thing for his designs.

"Our floating agents follow up on the work of our soda fountain clerks," he said softly.

She put both hands against her mouth to stop the trembling of her lips.

"You see we have four hundred recruited soda fountain clerks working currently. You can readily see that dropping a capsule into a drinking glass is a simple matter. Of course in the case of our fountain clerks there can be no follow ups as in the cases of doctors who can visit their patients without detection."

Theresa, moaned Sara voicelessly as her body rocked, oh, Theresa you didn't know he was a fiend . . .

"To continue," his voice was cool and kindly. "Because there can be no follow up by the clerk, there is a color additive in the capsule he administers. This tints the skin of the prospective recruit a faint blue discernible to our floating agents. Such as you would be, Sara. It is not a demanding task to simply walk about and look at people. Really that is all there is to it, my dear. You would have received excellent training before you begin.

"Yes, we leave nothing to chance. Simply, your specific work would be to move about without haste, on the alert for persons with tinted skin, and of course after a passage between the agent and the prospect, contact is made."

Her head was whirling now and almost without volition she ran to the window that fronted a busy, center city street. Looking down she saw streams of people going in all directions. Who now could she trust? Would she recognize a floating agent? Would she ever be able again to sit down at a drug store soda fountain? And that nice, well-mannered Jimmy at the corner candy store! Could she ever be certain that he was not a recruit?

She spun around to find Dr. Smith very close behind her.

"There is no fear in my land," he said softly.

"Don't touch me," she pleaded, shrinking against the wall.

"No," he said and turned away.

A hundred questions sent rockets bursting in her brain.

"What happens to these . . . tinted people?" she asked, her voice harsh in the quiet room. "What sort of lives do they lead until you contact them? If the capsule wipes out memory, how do they find their own homes and families?"

"Remember," he said soothingly, "that the process is gradual. Actually the whole thing is simple. On the fourth day after swallowing the capsule the prospect will not go home from his job. Or a woman, possibly marketing or returning from an afternoon with friends, will not return home to

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cook dinner. The prospect, his consciousness eager for change will drift until spotted by one of us. The floating agent is efficient, and alert. The prospect taken under the wing of the agent . . ." he paused in realization of the connotation his phrase now had for her.

She winced and looked away, trying to focus on an object in the room, an ordinary object like a chair or the books across the room. Her gaze returned to him.

"The agent will provide security by giving the prospect his key number and his base. These," once more he paused and smiled faintly, "are the amnesia victims about whom you often read in your newspapers." He seemed highly amused but continued presently.

"A group of us work close to your police stations. Oftimes when one such prospect is picked up by a policeman one of us claims to be a relative."

She had a sense of suffocation, as in deep sleep when, covered too tightly by blankets one struggles to get free.

"Some of our agents," he was saying conversationally, "are domestic help. You have heard of young mothers leaving their families without known cause. These are the result of our agents in the position of domestic help."

Her handbag fell to the floor with a clatter as the frame struck the baseboard.

"Teachers?" she gasped. "Have you infiltrated the schools?"

"No, we take no children," he said. "Our eugenics program is perfected and we want no children since they are disease carriers."

"I'm dreaming all this!" she cried out suddenly. "Tell me, I'm having nightmares!"

"You are awake," his voice came to her faintly. "I am your friend, Sara. Stop struggling and your panic will fade as if it had never been."

He went to the sink and washed his hands. She wanted to move but did not. He looked at her over his shoulder and smiled reassuringly and the roar in her ears became lessened.

She closed her eyes for an instant.

"I am Sara Beals," she said aloud, but the words had the ring of untruth.

He was coming toward her when she looked up.

"Sara," he said. She saw that he carried a glass of water.

"You will be a fine recruit, Sara. And later we can discuss whether you will do your best work here on Earth or on the home planet. You might, if you wish, remain on in the hospital, put in a request for ward duty and assist me directly. You and I would make a fine team I believe."

Did an aura of light surround him or was her vision blurred by the bright lamp he suddenly switched on. To work with him

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daily? She began to tremble once again.

He opened his hand and held it out toward her and on his palm there lay a white capsule.

"Place this upon your tongue, my dear," he said.

She sighed and took the capsule from his hand. She accepted the glass of water and sipped at its edge and all at once the coolness of the liquid was delicious to her parched throat. She tilted her head and dropped the capsule on her tongue.

"Yes," she said, although he had not asked a question.

He watched her drain the glass of water, his eyes clear, his lips gently smiling. Idly she wondered how long it would be before the capsule would dissolve so that its contents could enter her blood stream.

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the second sphere

by . . . Eric North

They didn't know how much they'd need someone who could tune in with the infinite itself. . . .

PROFESSOR HILDE GRAUT, Director of Observatory—Earth Space Platform Seven, sat at his desk in the Research Cupola, observing with a whimsical expression the interested faces of the three men opposite him across the high polish of the atomized granite top. The room was shaped something like the three-quarters part of an eggshell, the lower circumference supported on short fluted pillars of green synthetic jade. The rounded arc of the continuous wall was completely bare, save for a large oblong cosmar screen set in part relief immediately in front of the desk. To one side of the screen was the thin metal arm of the pantagraph that plotted a continuous graph of the activities passing over the glowing inter-stellar background, on an adjacent inwinding belt of white parchment. The belt was automatically fed into a slot in the wall immediately below a red desk marked: Visual Records—I.S.O.7.

"What is gravity?" Graut repeated. "Is it terra pull or cosmic push? Actually, we don't know. As with the electric fluid, we know the

Dr. Walstab felt that everything so far went to show that the mental and physical worlds were complementary. What happened when an effort was made to track down that unknown essence that lies at the back of the mind that some call the "secret place"? And what happened when Chris Sommers cried for help—straight across space—from a different plane of existence?

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effects, but of the thing itself we know nothing."

Graut was thin and spare. He had a high nose and deeply recessed eyes under ragged white brows. A clever face, seamed with the tiny ruts of a half century of scientific thinking, yet retaining its lines of human philosophy. There was humor in the twist of his taut lips, and a gleam of irony in the caverned blue eyes. One might very well say, meeting his direct look for the first time, that here was a man who had resolved in his own understanding, and in perfect personal conformity, the alleged differences between religion and science. He raised a hand now to tug gently the neat little bunch of white hair on his chin.

He said, answering the silence: "So many things we do not know. Truth is not alone at the bottom of the well. She has knowledge for company. Eh, Walstab? What has the metaphysician to say?" Doctor Walstab—short and thickset, with the eyes and brow of the born dreamer—said bluntly, "It is not my province. I will, however, go so far as to say that everything so far goes to show that the mental and physical worlds are complementary. Gravity plays a part even in the supernatural, that unknown essence at the back of the mind which we speak of as the arcana, or secret place."

"Conscience?" the man on his left queried. He was young and spruce, and spoke in a clipped but friendly voice. He wore the etheric-silver uniform of Ace Commander attached to the *Flash* Squadron of the Terra Cosmarctic Exploration Division, and bore the gold-lettered insignia C.E.D. on his right cuff.

"If you like, Peters. I was thinking of it under the text-book name of Impulse of the Psyche—that flow-in behind the conscious which impinges from outside the normally understood."

"I don't get you."

Professor Graut put in gently: "What Walstab means, I think—and I agree with him—is that there is a larger consciousness which can only be comprehended in the life to come, but which in moments of stress in human affairs does occasionally attempt to influence personal decisions."

The Commander laughed.

"I'm afraid, Professor, I have no belief in human survival. Religion! Heaven and hell, and all the rest of it! You'd think, if there were any real clues we'd have found at least one of them by this time, now that we're free to explore Space. Life everywhere . . . Life, even though it's in quite different forms to ourselves, oh, yes; in cases, intelligent, highly intelligent life forms, but still in the same old three-dimensional pattern. It seems like the mould on a cheese, merely a phase of cosmic evolution. And when that phase is left behind in the evolutionary race, life will go with it into the discard."

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"A bleak philosophy," Graut said.

Dr. Walstab corrected: "A quite erroneous philosophy."

"Short of proof, either way," Peters smiled, "a matter of opinion."

He turned to the fourth man. "Jaguers, you were with me in that crash on the dark star belt last fall. We came out by a miracle. As a Class A. Spectrology Expert—in fact, so good that Professor Graut had you seconded to operate the screenings here on E.S.P. Seven—did you, in those moments of expected dissolution, touch anything—anything at all—outside the envelope of normal existence?"

"Can't I say I did, sir," Jaguers said. His round but keen face wore a slight bewilderment. "All I did was to wonder how long my pressurizer would hold out, and what they'd be having for supper in the mess I'd be missing that night."

"Well, there you are," The Ace Commander said triumphantly.

"One man's reactions," Graut said.

Dr. Walstab was frowning.

"You know, Graut, it's rather peculiar. I never noticed it before. E.S.P. Seven."

The Ace Commander stared at him.

"What's wrong with it?"

Graut, aware of the doctor's sudden concentration, spoke for him. "Nothing at all. As a matter of fact, I noticed it for myself as soon as you spoke. E.S.P. . . . Earth Space Platform. But the initials also stand for Extra Sensory Perception, Dr. Walstab's particular study."

"Coincidence, of course."

"Doubtless," Dr. Walstab said, coming out of his abstraction. "It touched a trigger in my mind somewhere, all the same. Well, no matter."

Professor Graut said evenly: "On the contrary. You're new here, Walstab, and I know you've been wondering just how you fit in a practical setup like Platform Seven. I'm not sure myself, but for a long time I've been considering the chances of a mental link-up with the work here. Screen searching, space exploration . . . we need something to go with them, something that might be able to tune in with the Infinite itself. I express myself awkwardly, since I'm still groping. But I think you know what I'd be at. So I got you along . . ."

"I see," Walstab said thoughtfully. "You think E.S.P.—my E.S.P. can touch more deeply than even the cosmic rays?"

"Because, impinging from without our cosmic pattern, instead of from within, as I have said, they are not subject to three dimensional restrictions. Exactly. I'm afraid you don't look very sympathetic, Jaguers?"

"Not in my line of country, sir. I believe in things I can see, hear and touch. Results . . . I mean, of course, *proved* results. I don't see how it's possible to prove telepathy."

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"Can you define that?" Graut challenged.

"Not yet. We're still waiting for the real break through. But you could say that telepathy rests on brain frequencies while E.S.P. is concerned with soul frequencies. The one is rooted in the physical, the other is of the very essence of the psyche itself.

"Too subtle for me."

"Well, gentlemen," Professor Graut broke in, "interesting as all this is, we must get down to business. As you know, this conference is called to discuss the progress of the expedition Exploration Jupiter, now in the vicinity of the small satellite Jupiter VIII."

He touched a thin hand lightly over the air to his right, breaking required ray contacts. Several things followed in sequence. The Time Robot announced smoothly, "At the third stroke it will be 5.45 Greenwich Mean Time, and 18 arcs of Solar Space Time. Cosmic Compass shows the pericope of Earth's swing to be 5 degrees variable, west of Saturn line." As the voice died, a section of the wall opened smoothly to extend a gleaming white-metal-arm which deposited a number of files on the desk at Graut's elbow, withdrawing itself immediately into the recess, which closed with a subdued click. Simultaneously, the Sound Gatherer of the Cosmar Screen came into action, and the room was filled with the myriad murmurings of space acoustics.

As Graut unfolded a map of Jupiter Quadrant, Ace Peters made a face and said: "Jupiter VIII. Wasn't that the sector the Vibrant cruised for hours, but we couldn't find him?"

"Wasn't there something else?" The Ace frowned. "Something pretty queer . . ."

The Spectrology Expert gulped.

"Yes, sir. I don't know though if I can explain it. Something about it . . . not so nice. We were holding him all the time right in the spot of the ether lamp . . . the new Z type, that's fitted with the telescopic lens. So it brought the whole thing right up close. Chris began to go at the feet . . . I mean that part of him just went out like a light. The rest of his body followed, until there was only his head left. Then that went too. Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Just a blank, sir."

"Disintegrated, you mean?"

Jaguers shook his head.

"No. I've seen a man disintegrate. He fell to bits, as you might say, all in one piece. But with Chris it was a piece at a time. We were nowhere near the gravity tug-line, either, so it wasn't that."

"I'm only learning on your side of the fence," Dr. Walstab said. "When you say gravity tug-line, Jaguers . . ."

The Ace Commander interrupted. "We don't know much about it. In theory, it's the dividing line between solar pull and galactic pull.

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If you don't take it at the right speed and inclination, you're for it. I've seen a ship pulled in half that way. Torn across like a piece of paper by the opposing gravities. You can imagine what it would do to flesh and blood."

"In a sense," Jaguers added, "it's like cracking the sound barrier . . . with the air pushed ahead into a solid wall. Until we learnt how to do it."

Professor Graut's voice broke the speculative silence.

"You've got that gadget of yours with you, Walstab?"

"Yes. It's had a local testing, as you know. I can't claim anything for it really, until there's a chance for long range."

Dr. Walstab drew from a plastic case a circular object about the size of a small dinner plate, and placed it gently on the granite desk. Its depth of some four inches appeared to be made up of an intricate pattern of spirals, laced with small silver-shining bulbs. From a slightly raised boss at its center a number of filaments radiated like the main cables of a spider-web, each terminating in a tiny red sucker-disc.

"Perhaps you had better explain to the others," Graut smiled. "In broad terms only, of course. I might say, gentlemen, that this invention of Dr. Walstab's, which he called an I.G.—short for Ideagraphometer—is likely to be of the greatest assistance in maintaining our contacts in outer space, if it functions as the doctor hopes. Over to you, Walstab."

"Putting it briefly then," Walstab told them, "I.G. is a machine for picking up mind pictures. It is compounded—I am speaking quite roughly—of ores ranging from uranium, kasolite, curite, and so on, to the black Australian davidite. All ores give out rays. If you like, wavelengths. By compounding certain such rays, after some years of careful experiment, I have—I hope and believe—found a wavelength that is not, frankly speaking, of the physical and three-dimensional, but enters into the economy of the mind itself. Possibly, even of the soul. It remains to be proved."

"You plug it in?" the Ace Commander said, in an unbelieving voice. "Or has the thing a battery inside it?"

"Neither the one nor the other. I've already explained that I.G. is —to put it simply—other dimensional. It is a matter, Ace, of vibrations, operating on their own inherent source of power. Dr. Walstab looked around him with suddenly dreaming eyes. "The creative power, gentlemen."

Again fell a little silence, broken only by the sibilant orchestration coming from the cosmar screen. It seemed to Professor Graut that a new and strange note had joined them—a note uncomfortably suggestive of urgency, even disaster, in some cosmic pocket of space, and he frowned and stared at the pulsing visual background.

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The Spectrology Expert had also noticed the subtle addition and he rose quietly and began a rapid test of the control board. He switched from micro-stellar wave to solar-wave, and the hissing died, and the screen cleared to a transparent blue, on which showed a formation of speeding red dots. Ordinary static crackled, as he tuned the solar band; but immediately he returned to the micro-stellar wave, the screen was obscured by its earlier glowing confusion, and the myriad tongues of the galaxies flooded in. The new note persisted. It seemed, if anything, to have gained in isolating itself from the surrounding medley of star chord and discord.

"I can't find anything wrong with it," Jaguers said, in response to Professor Graut's raised eyebrows. "Definitely, I'd say, sir, the interference is not a mechanical fault. Just a minute, though . . ."

He touched the Odor Switch, and the air of the cupola was faintly impregnated with the indefinable scents of the Universe—the perfume of incredibly distant Elysian Fields; the sharp, acrid flavours of laboring creative tissues; the reek of cosmic chemicals, and the warmth and balminess of life budding under far-off suns. They were familiar with such cosmic blendings—on the whole, pleasant and exciting. But every man now recognized a slight and sinister taint.

Jaguers shrugged and turned the switch off.

He said, as he took his place at the granite desk: "It's not in the machine, whatever it is, sir. All the same, I'll make a check-up later. That new smell . . ."

"Stink," the Ace Commander said. "Maybe a dead planet some place."

He grinned.

Professor Graut said soberly: "I don't like it. Jaguers, make the check as soon as you can. No, leave the screen alive. That new sound may link with the odor. Well, now . . . time's getting on. First, I'd like to run over the position of D.S.S. Challenge Queen, now cruising off Jupiter VIII. Follow me on the chart here . . ."

"Right. Jupiter VIII, I don't need to remind you, is the eighth satellite of the Planet Jupiter. Now, the peculiar thing about this satellite—the problem with which the Challenge Queen expedition is in fact, primarily concerned—is that whereas the seven inner satellites revolve around the parent planet in the same direction as it rotates on its axis, the eighth—Jupiter VIII—has a retrograde motion; it goes round the other way. Its average distance from Jupiter—I'm sorry to inflict this elemental stuff on you, gentlemen, but it is necessary we should hold all our data clearly in mind—is some fourteen and a half million miles, and it revolves in a little over two years. Jupiter VIII was, of course, discovered by Melotte in 1908."

Dr. Walstab was only half listening. This was, as he had bluntly

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reminded Professor Graut, a practical aspect of Terra Research which belonged solely to practical men. His absorbing interest—you could almost call it an obsession—lay with the abstract. In his classes at Solar University, before he had been specially applied for by Research, E.S.P. Seven, this unyielding attitude has earned him the class soubriquet of "Old Mind Stuff Walstab". He did not resent it. Rather, he took pride in rooting intelligent life in the soil of the mental, as opposed to the material, plane. One of his favorite illustrations was the irrefutable fact that before a thing could make its appearance on the physical plane, it had first to come into existence on the mental plane. All creation had its origins in preceding thought. Practical accomplishment could only have origin in the foetus of Mind.

So, now, he gave his attention more and more to the singular note intermingling with the familiar tension of the cosmar screen. It came in ever increasing systole and dyastole; now and then, the whole fading to a mere murmur, but finding every minute a renewed vigor, and —Dr. Walstab recognized in astonishment—something very like purpose. There were, indeed, moments when he thought to recognize the pattern of the human voice. Utterly impossible, of course; yet he felt a crawling sensation at his spine. The visual turmoil was, he told himself, also gaining momentum. The glowing background was perceptibly darker. There was a ragged core of shadow at its center.

He dragged his mind back to reality.

"The problem immediately confronting the crew of D.S.S. Challenge Queen," Professor Graut was saying, "is to proceed by stages from Jupiter VIII, via Jupiter VII, Jupiter VI. Callisto, Ganymede, Europa and Io, to Jupiter V.—which finds them a mere 112,600 miles from the planet itself. Ace Vice-Marshall Benhurion, in command, has full instructions. He will, if possible, reach Jupiter V. and there establish a base. The region of the seven inner satellites being as yet quite unknown to us—I remind you that the video screens can be misleading as to practical details, very often—we are not hopeful that he will, in fact, get further in than, say, Callisto. Until we receive his next report, due midnight, Earth time, we cannot really assess the chances. Meantime, our present purpose is to plot in preparation for any and every eventuality."

"Where is Challenge Queen now, sir?" Ace Peters asked.

"Approximately in the same sector as Vibrant was, two years ago. You laid the base on Jupiter VIII, then, Jaguers."

"Yes, sir. That was after Chris was . . . was lost."

Dr. Walstab, deciding he ought to show more interest in the conver-

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sation, muttered: "But you're guessing a lot, aren't you?"

"How come, guessing?" the Ace Commander said, a little offendedly. Galactic navigation was rather a pet of his. "I say, there's a lot of noise coming off the cosmar, isn't there? Do we need it to function here? If anything turns up, there's the Watch Shift in the Laboratory Block?"

Without quite knowing why he said it, Jageurs explained: "They've no Odour Switch, sir."

"What's that got to do with it?"

The Spectrology Expert was confused.

"Sorry, Ace. It just flashed into my mind."

The Ace Commander repeated his question.

"Where's the guessing, doctor? You and Jaguers here seem to be a pair."

Dr. Walstab said calmly: "You know very well, Peters, we're still muddled over the Cosmic Cardinal points. Where is your northernmost in Space?"

"Got you there, Ace," Professor Graut smiled. "Still, we're approximately very nearly, Walstab, on the whole. We . . ."

His voice was lost in a sudden enormous upsurge from the Cosmar Screen. Cutting it like a knife came a single cry that instantly fell back, as it were, into a crevasse of Time and Space of such unendurable depths as to chill their very imagination. There are experiences so delicately balanced on the line dividing the physical and mental worlds, that there is no distinguishing between the reality and the dream. This nightmare impact hurled them to their feet in a clammy horror.

Not yet, however, the full of the Incredible. The cry, high-pitched by its emotional charge, had found its vibrational color complement in a stab of blinding white light; but now, as it faltered, the immeasurably lower vibrations of the three-dimensional drew it into a pattern of recognizable human speech.

"Terra! . . . Terra! . . . Can you hear me, Terra? Can you hear me?"

The ragged patch that Dr. Walstab had seen at the center of the visual, had returned. It opened momentarily to picture a distorted face, that formed and re-formed as in the focussing lense of a camera, and then spread like a fluid, to vanish thinly.

"My God!" Jaguers yelled. "It's Chris Sommers! . . . Chris, we can hear you. Where are you? . . . Chris!"

The fury on the Cosmar Screen threw up a kind of visual blister, as if to the thrust of some monstrous impulse. It struggled and broke into blurred outlines, and was gone. Down the tunnel of the æons, the cry wailed, swelling and fading by turns.

"Terra! . . . Can you hear me, Terra?"

"Chris!" Panting, the Spectrology Expert manipulated the Sound Thrower Switch. "Chris! Come in,

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Chris. It's Ben here . . . Ben Jaguers."

At his back, the Ace Commander stammered: "This is madness. Chris Sommers is dead . . ."

"Chris! Chris!" Jaguers called, in a kind of frenzy.

"Easy," Professor Graut croaked. He touched Ace Peters with his tenuous fingers. "Easy, Ace. If this thing is true . . . Let Jaguers handle things. Those two were bosom friends. They're in tune . . . don't you see?"

"Chris! It's Ben here . . . Ah!"

"Ben?"

"Yes, yes. We can hear you Chris. Where are you?"

"I . . . don't know. Ben, for God's sake . . ."

"Some place, Chris. You must be some place."

"Good old Ben . . . Not . . . any place . . . we knew. A sphere, they call it. The Second Sphere . . ."

"Planet?"

"I don't think so, no. Ben, can you hear me?"

"Yes. Go on. Only tell us where, Chris. We'll have you out of it. Tell us where? WHERE?"

"I can't." Sommers' voice faded out. It came back on a desperate note. "Are you there, Ben?"

"Yes. Never mind what happened to you. Where ARE you?"

"Some . . . of laboratory . . . I got away from them . . . Look, I'm using one of their . . . No, it's no good . . . Can't get enough power . . . my voice."

"Chris! Keep going, old boy."

Suddenly, a white-lipped Dr. Walstab was at Jaguers' side. They saw now that he had unwound the filaments from his Ideagraphometer, holding them bunched in his hand. He motioned them to take their seats at the granite desk.

He said, "Quickly. See these red suckers at the ends? Clamp them on the medulla oblongata . . . base of the skull. Here, let me show you, Ace. That's right . . . Jaguers, tell him . . . tell Chris, to quit trying to make himself heard. Tell him to relax and just *think*. Tell him to let his mind go back and to concentrate on a mental picture of what happened. Tell him we'll be following that picture in our own minds. Got it?"

He turned shining eyes on Professor Graut.

"The acid test, Graut. God grant it works . . . Keep your minds blank. Don't *think*. It will be Sommers' mind, not yours . . ."

They heard Jaguers final words, ere he joined them.

"All right, Chris . . . Do just that. I'll call you again . . . wherever you are, whatever it is, we'll get you out. See? Hang to that . . ."

He was in the Space Lock of the Vibrant. A part of the gear above seemed to have jammed, and the chief, Ace Torquil, who never took any risk, had sent him down to track the fault. In that tightly boxed compartment, purposely without its own lighting—since any real light intensity tended to injure

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the effectiveness of the etheric vacuum—it was difficult to see, and he could only go over the tightly packed becquerelite cables piecemeal, an inch at a time, with the aid of his solar pencil flash. It was a full hour before he came on the small unraveled strand responsible for the missing circuit. He worked in a new wire, called up the tube for a testing, and stepped down on the floor of the lock.

Exactly what happened, he did not know. A loose spring on the Space Shute possibly, he later decided. At any rate, a foot skidded and the next moment he was down the shute and clear of the ship. He had enough presence of mind to draw down the visor of his helmet, before the valves admitted the radio-active poisons. The chemicals stored in the container of his space suit began at once to feed the oxygen tubes. In that immense void of outer space he was not conscious of any motion, but he could see Vibrant slowly lifting, although she herself was more or less anchored by her vanes. She was hovering for the immediate purpose of tabulating the depth of the layer of aerial ocean off the shores of Jupiter VIII; and charting any dark stars in the vicinity, to pass on to the Cartography Section.

His first thought was that unless someone on the ship saw him in time to send out a rescue minnow, he had no chance of survival at all. For gravity he was dependent upon his own mass, which was just enough above zero to hold his body together for some fifteen minutes, before it inevitably began to disintegrate. Moreover, his suit was leaded only sufficiently to withstand lethal cosmic radiation for an equivalent time. Vibrant herself, and the three minnows she carried, were protected by a fifty-feet-thick envelope of vaporized lead, held by powerful magnets; but it had not been found possible to make use of this sheathing in the space suits. He had, therefore, only a few minutes to live.

He was some fifty feet below the ship, when he felt something brush his drawn-up knees. Startled, he looked down, but could see nothing. The feeling persisted, and he twisted on his face and reached out his hands. His whole body seemed to settle on an invisible bulk, that gave back a barely recognizable sensation of sponginess. Almost immediately, he had an impression of being touched here and there, as if being explored by fingers as hesitant and mystified as his own. Vibrant was still overhead and the gap had widened, and even in his stress of mind it struck him as odd that their relative vertical positions were unchanged; when, by his reckoning of the ether tides, he should have been drifting to approximate cosmic west.

A sudden stab of pain in his right foot, made him gasp. His pulses began to hammer and there came an extraordinary feeling of unsubstantiality in his blood. It

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rose like a tide along his veins, and his nerve ends pricked and jerked. The bulk beneath him became more real. His fingers met with increasingly greater resistance as he fumbled about him. Looking toward his feet, he was seized with horror. He still had the feel of them, but he could not see them. As he stared, the incredible annulment of his visible being flowed over his knees and along his thighs. His downflung hands met only space, until they were bruised on the steadily manifesting hard surface supporting him. He felt himself being slowly dismembered, dissolved, in a whirlpool of new screaming cells and fibres. The pit of his stomach seemed to float into his head. Before he lapsed into unconsciousness, he was aware of noise and confusion, and strange odors, and hands that were like talons taking hold of him and lifting him . . .

"Fight it! Fight it!" Dr. Walstab said hoarsely. "We must keep our own consciousness, whatever happens. Sit quiet. Sommers will come out of it . . . At the moment, the whole thing is being re-enacted . . . I don't doubt he's working with some sort of mind machine there . . . wherever it is, whatever it is. Easy, now. This faintness will pass."

Jaguers wiped the sweat from his face. He said nothing, but his eyes were tormented.

"A thing like that . . ." the Ace Commander was muttering. "Chris Sommers has been dead for two years . . . two years."

"Obviously *not* dead," Dr. Walstab said sharply.

"Then . . . where is he?"

Jaguers turned on him.

"You heard, didn't you? He's . . . some place. Professor Graut . . . sir, isn't there anything we can do? Anything at all?"

"One thing, perhaps—yes," Graut said, rousing himself from his stupor. He did something with his right hand, and a tiny bell rang, and a man's voice said clearly: "Cartography."

"Sidbee? Graut. First, on no account am I to be disturbed. Leave contacts to me. Find out exactly what arc of sector Vibrant researched off Jupiter VIII. Roughly two years ago. Turn up her log and note the times readings for the disappearance from her of Leading Spacelectrician Christopher Sommers. Got that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Challenge Queen is in the same sector now, or closely thereabouts. Check the two positions. Hold one Spaceline clear of all traffic until you hear from me again. This is top priority. Cancel any bookings on that line and let the Director of Spacelines know what you've done, and the authority."

"Very good, sir."

Graut said presently, with a little gesture of helplessness, "But until we know where he is . . ."

Jaguers groaned. "He doesn't know himself."

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"He *told* us it wasn't any place we know," the Ace Commander backed up.

"Easy," Dr. Walstab said again. A thought came to him. "Jaguers, I suggest you try the Odour Switch. Might be a clue there. A bare chance."

"But . . . would it work . . . I mean, if Chris isn't anywhere in our own galaxy . . ." the Spectrology Expert stammered.

"I said, *try* it. Doesn't it occur to you that nothing of all this is possible at all, unless worked from *both* ends. Not even the I.G. . . . the Ideagraphometer, we're using. Sommers must have got hold of something similar . . ." Dr. Walstab's voice was quietly triumphant. "I don't want to boast, Graut . . ."

"Boast all you like," the Professor smiled weakly. "I'm not sure, speaking for myself, that I can even boast of my own sanity. Do you suppose . . ." He broke off, to say, "Good God! that . . . smell frightens me. Jaguers . . . !"

Although the throw of the Odour Switch had been instantly cut again, the dull, musty odor that had crept into the room sickened them. There was about it something tomb-like and cankerous.

Ace Peters said, in a strangled voice: "It's a dead world . . . dead. This is insane. I'm with you there, Professor."

The Cosmar Screen knew a sudden agitation and Dr. Walstab cried urgently: "Blank your minds . . . throttle back your own thinking . . . Sommers is coming back to consciousness."

He was lying on a couch in a room walled about with glass, or what seemed to be glass. It was transparent, anyhow, and through it he could make out a number of rounded domes, like beehives, and beyond them an immense aerodrome sprouting tall masts and parallel lines of narrow buildings, topped with gleaming antennae. He saw the yawning mouth of an enormous hangar, from which was slowly emerging a ship of greater proportions than he had ever seen, and of a design so fantastic that he could hardly believe his eyes. She was like an immense wheel on a horizontal plane, with eight or more spokes resembling elongated hutments, that ran in from the circumference of the wheels to join a great domed hub. She glowed with unnatural colors and brilliance, and now he made out several figures climbing over her, and on the ground about her. They were human figures, but with a difference. What the difference was, he could not determine, until a sound at his back made him turn.

Two men were in the room with him. Recognizably men, but men deformed and physically distorted to nightmarish proportions. Their thin, hairless faces were paper-white and ageless, and their bodies were sunk into long tunics of an indeterminate green. Ape-like arms hung almost to the floor . . .

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It was then he remembered . . . and looked at his own body, and was almost hysterically relieved to discover that it was all in place, and that he could see it as well as feel its reality; and that, apart from a sensation of extraordinary lightness and unsubstantiality, there was nothing wrong with him physically, anyhow. He had been stripped of his space suit—suddenly he saw it thrown over the back of another couch—but was otherwise as he would normally have expected, except that his right foot still tingled slightly.

One of the men said, in a flat voice: "That is something you will have to get used to . . . You were right, Azard. An entirely successful experiment. The first of its kind. I congratulate you on obtaining a living specimen. It was the one thing needed. Nothing now stands in the path of our progress."

This was so much Greek to him.

"Who are you? How did I come here? What *is* this place?"

The second man, ignoring him, said, in a voice as emotionless as that of his companion: "I agree, Swat. Hitherto we have had to work on the dead structure of the machines, and, although we have progressed over the infinities, countless more infinities would have been required before we could have effectively metamorphosed. The Sphere they call Earth and the Universe, the First Sphere, is at our mercy."

He told himself: "I can be dead . . . if that's what it is . . . but I'm still Chris Sommers. I'm still myself. These guys . . ."

"So your name is Chris Sommers," Swat said. For the first time, they gave him their attention, and the stony and deadly apathy of their gaze brought him a chill of fear. He realized that what approach to his kind they had, was on the surface only. They were as unfeeling and heartless as machines. "A creature from the First Sphere. What else do you tell us?"

A second discovery took him by surprise. These men . . . he didn't know yet what else to call them . . . were not speaking in the literal sense, had never actually reached his ears at all. They were merely sending him their thoughts, and were reading his. It was not what he had said, but the images prompting his words, that they were understanding. So he had no need to be vocal. He let his thoughts run now, but—because he was both afraid and angry—stubbornly held them from anything that he believed they wanted to know. So far, he made no sense of anything at all. Why, they were speaking—thinking, that was—in English, in his own language. That made it crazier than ever.

He had scarcely thought this, than he was answered. Swab's cold-blooded tones came: "You are now in the Sphere of the Elemental. The elemental understands all languages, since the so-called differences in language are merely

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phonetic delusions . . . So you have decided to obstruct us? That will avail you nothing, Chris Sommers."

"Maybe. What is this place?"

"I have told you. This is the Second Sphere."

"You mean . . . another dimension? I've heard about that."

"Another vibration. Another plane. We are not concerned with what you call dimension."

He said, drawing what comfort he could from his natural cheekiness: "Just as you like, Mister. You still haven't told me how I got here, or where you come into things? Or maybe you don't know, any more than I do?"

The other man, Azard, answered him this time.

"You fell on the platform of one of Elemental's ships. Doubtless from some ship of your own. No matter. As I assume, gamma particles from Sphere 1, sufficiently impregnated your substance to raise your vibrations to the point where we were each of us en rapport with each other's spheres. You were accordingly given an injection of an elemental drug which immediately raised your vibrations to the point of entry into the Second Sphere."

"That was the pain in my foot?"

"Pain! I do not know the word, pain. The injection was given in one of your feet—yes. It is a temporary treatment. It will be repeated when seven eons have gone. Your vibrations will then be fixed permanently to those of this sphere."

He thought over this, staring at the twin and ghastly faces.

"I see. And . . . if I don't get this other dose?"

"There is no escape, Chris Sommers. We have a definite need of your Sphere 1 body. It is your great fortune to give yourself to the science of Sphere 2—the Second sphere . . . whose Great and Glorious God and Ruler is Elemental Pan."

"I daresay you know. Still . . . supposing what you call my vibrations did run down to . . . to what they were before? I can be curious, can't I?"

Zwat, who, with Azard, had bowed his head deeply to the sounding of the name of the God Pan, straightened again.

"In the event of such impossibility, you would find yourself in whatever position we found you. Assuming that you had, indeed, fallen from your ship, you would perish in your own surroundings, in circumstances of which I have no doubt you are fully aware. You would merely exchange one disintegration for another."

"What does that mean?" he asked, with a constriction of his heart. For a single wild instant, he wondered what his chances would be if he made a dash for the open. "What's your game? This could be some place in the solar system."

Zwat looked at him with suddenly cruel eyes.

"Your coming here, Chris Sommers, was what you in the First

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Sphere would call a miracle . . . oh, yes, we are closer to your stupid minds than your sphere dreams of. Miracles of a like kind, do not happen twice."

"So what?" he demanded.

Even now, he could not quite bring himself to believe he was not dreaming all this. It was too utterly fantastic. Some corner of interstellar space, perhaps—maybe one of the many unchartered dark stars known to be in the Jupiter satellite belt. Yes, he could understand that. But all this talk of spheres and vibrations . . . where did that get him? He managed a grin, as he recalled how hotted-up most of them had been at the bit of a party held in the Vibrant's Spacelectricians' Mess the evening before. Some party. He had a faint memory of Ben Jaguers helping him into his bunk . . . this could be a sort of hangover . . . probably Ace Torquil, and the space lock jam, and all the rest of it, had got mixed up in his head.

He came from his musings to find he was once more alone. The two Elementals . . . he decided to call them that . . . had somehow just faded out. Well, he was rid of that part of it, anyhow. Maybe, the rest of it would fade out too, and he'd wake up in his bunk to hear old Ben yelling at him the duty bell had gone.

Suddenly he felt very tired. He went over to the couch and stretched himself on it. Supposing he *was* asleep, could he go to sleep again inside the first sleep? Sort of dreaming you went to sleep, when you were asleep? He grinned and closed his eyes . . .

The four men in the Cupola on E. S. P. Seven roused themselves one by one. They were more composed now, more used to the amaze of the thing; they were better able to think and plan and come to grips with the enormity of the problem. Each, in his own way, showed his determination to do all that was humanly possible to reduce the incredible to terms of the credible, so that it could be handled with some approach to the sane and practical.

Dr. Walstab said: "While we are waiting, it will help if I try to put together what we have so far learnt of the conditions now holding Chris Sommers."

"The province of the mind, yes," Graut said. "To begin with, what do you understand by spheres? Ideas . . . elementals . . .?"

"That's it," the Ace Commander put in. "Where *is* Sommers? How can we get to him, if we don't rightly know where he is? Elemental? The Elementals? Where is Elemental? The navigating charts don't list the name. Maybe some asteroid . . ."

Walstab shook his head.

"We'll begin there, Ace. If you know anything of what we call occultism, you'll know that there is a great body of evidence to prove the intrusion into our system of a class of beings of a low state of spiritual development, but not necessarily of

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intellectual development, known to us as elementals."

"Poltergeists?" Jaguers said.

"Including Poltergeists," Walstab agreed. "They are supposed to come from a plane of existence apart from, but contiguous to, our own three-dimensional. If the account given by Chris is correct, this plane is called the Second Sphere, or Elemental; a sphere next to, and larger than our own Solar or First Sphere, and corresponding to its space surface in location though not in substance. There are thought to be a number of such spheres, each one wrapped successively about its fellow, and rising in outward order and development. There is also some evidence suggesting that it is to Elemental, or the Second Sphere, that certain patently undeveloped souls in Earth life are sent after death; but this is an aspect with which we are not now concerned. The immediate problem is how to reach Chris."

Graut said: "Spheres not of dimensions but vibrations. Exactly. The thing begins to shape itself a little."

"Chris Sommers by some extraordinary cosmic transmutation—you heard the reference to gamma particles—entered, or, rather, pierced the envelope of concentric hollow or Elemental, because his vibrations were raised correspondingly. Apparently, in his case, these rapidly increased vibrations can be fixed."

"In seven aeons," the Ace Commander quoted. "What time measure is an aeon?"

"I don't know," Walstab said. "Possibly some division of what we term an aeon—as we say, meaning eternity. And who can measure eternity?"

Ben Jaguers broke the brooding silence. He said restlessly: "Where does all this talk get us? Say we know the name of the place Chris is, that still doesn't tell us where it is, or how we can get Chris out of it."

"He'll tell us himself," Dr. Walstab said quietly. He added, in reply to their looks of astonishment: "Not in so many words, of course, for he is quite unarmed, unless we can help him; but by inference. He has already given us some valuable hints."

"What I can't understand," Ace Peters said, "is how we're getting all this within minutes, if you know what I mean. Chris has been . . . has been missing for two years. Two years!"

"I think I can explain that. In Elemental, this Second Sphere, all vibrations are enormously speeded up. I say, ALL . . . which includes even Time itself. Two years of our own time could conceivably be matched by only two days of Elemental time; possibly as little as two hours. Since Chris has, by our reckoning, been in the Second Sphere for two years already, and has not—so far as we can yet gather—received his second and final vibrational inoculation, it

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follows that the seven aeons are not yet up."

"It's beyond me," the Ace Commander said hopelessly.

Professor Graut was speaking to Cartography.

"Jupiter VIII, second arc of sector. Thank you, Sidbee. Flash Challenge Queen telling her to proceed there at once and to clear all space stations, pending further instructions. Note for Operation Elemental: all minnows to be overhauled and in readiness for instant launching. Good."

He turned to Dr. Walstab. He said: "I'm doing what I can, but I say frankly I don't see how we're to get Sommers, so to speak, into the open. I'll say this, too—win or lose, this I.G. of yours, Walstab, has at least made it possible for us to contact and perhaps comfort the poor fellow. He'll know our thoughts are with him . . ."

Walstab smiled.

"I'm not without hope, even so, Graut. I glimpse a way out . . . a bare glimpse. No, I can't go into details—yet. Everything depends on what next the I.G. brings us."

"God bless you," Jaguers stammered. "I can—hold on . . . The screen's moving . . ."

"He's waking," Dr. Walstab warned.

When he opened his eyes he found nothing changed. Oddly, he was not in the least thirsty or hungry. He tried to reckon up how long it was since he had fallen through the Vibrant's shute, but there was no means of telling. The watch on his wrist had not only stopped, but the hands seemed to have fused, and when he shook it they just crumbled into dust. The half light beyond the window was unaltered. What he could make out of the sky had a smooth waxy shine to it. There was no sun, or hint of any natural luminary, that he could see. It was like a perpetual twilight. Perhaps, in Elemental, there was no night or day. Perhaps the Elementals didn't need any sleep . . .

Yet, maybe they did. Maybe, although the light remained the same, there were intervals in which they rested. At any rate, there was no sign of any life on the great landing field. The queer-looking ship had vanished. The hangar door was closed. There were a few small craft resting on speedways, whose design he couldn't make out, but otherwise the place was deserted. Asleep. The idea persisted. And with it came a second idea, an exciting idea. Now was his chance to get out of this place—this building, anyhow. Maybe, if he could get hold of one of those parked machines, he could fly it out . . . But he gave that up at once. He was convinced now that all this was no dream. So long as his vibrations held up, he was imprisoned in Elemental.

But the thought led on. He was beginning to find the answer to some things at least. The talk be-

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tween those two ghastly Elementals . . . what were their names? Swat and Azard. That was it. Something about the progress of experiments in penetrating the curtain between their two spheres, to the point of partial manifestation in the three-dimensional. Working on what they called dead machines; and, now, exulting in the capture of himself, a living machine, with which to work out, guinea-pig fashion, a complete and fixed mastery of First Sphere vibrations, particularly—as he understood the sinister implications—those of Earth's atmosphere.

Penetrating the curtain! . . . His mind went back to the lectures of his graduation days at Solar University, and the post course in astral photism; how each vibrational light world co-existed with those immediately below and above it, so that although they were fused each had its independent practical world. In three-dimensional Terra, for example, you could thrust out an arm into apparent space, yet that arm could actually be penetrating a solidity—say, a battleship sailing on an ocean—in a four dimensional set up. Everything was a matter of vibrations; and the known vibrations on Earth were, to the unknown, as an inch to a mile.

He was not very well up in this sort of thing, but he thought he now knew the answer to some, at least, of the problems surrounding the fantastic stories of flying saucers, unidentified space ships, and so on, which suddenly appeared over Terra and as inexplicably disappeared. Sometimes only fragments of such a machine were seen . . . like an arm thrust through the dividing curtain and then withdrawn. Machines from the Second Sphere, only partly successful in the attempts to manifest in the First Sphere. They were already there, of course; had always been there; but intangible and invisible. Now, by lowering their vibrations, they were becoming both tangible and visible.

He began a feverish examination of the room. Smooth as glass, the walls ran in an unbroken surface. Common sense told him there must be an opening, a door, somewhere, for how, otherwise, had he entered it? How had Zwat and Azard come and gone? He found it by pure accident, when on the verge of despair. His fingernail caught in a depression so cunningly masked that it could have passed for a small flaw in the composition, but was in reality a release contact. An oblong opened. He had no sooner passed through it than, like the automatic door of an elevator, it closed again. He had picked up his space suit on an impulse. The fabric still held, as did that of his clothing; but in both were manifest signs of crumbling. When the struggle between the opposing vibrations was resolved, as it must be, in favor of those of the Second Sphere, the whole substance would probably disappear.

Before him stretched a long cor-

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ridor, lined with blank, shining walls. He turned right, at a venture. He went up a short flight of steps and across a landing, to a cross corridor, and turned right once more. All at once he heard voices. That is to say, his mind heard them, for sound as he knew it simply did not exist. He realized then that Elemental had no atmosphere, in its three-dimensional sense; and, without atmosphere there can be no sound. He was in a world of the mind, of the elemental. Another thought came. Rather, it was a sensation. His body was becoming heavier. His sight was a trifle blurred. He seemed to be subtly balancing between real and unreal. With understanding, sweat started on his forehead. The effect of the vibrational inoculation was evidently passing. The seven aeons were coming to an end. He must hurry . . . hurry.

He rounded a corner and halted abruptly. Before him was a wide foyer spaced with cones of gleaming metal. Beyond them showed, at the head of a short ramp, a narrow door slightly ajar. There came to him the hum of hidden dynamos.

In a space to the left, between a group of cones, three Elementals were crouched. They appeared to be playing some kind of game. Their backs were to him, yet somehow he knew an awareness of something alien had touched them. Against a wall leaned a curiously shaped tube, obviously some kind of stunguh, with a push-button trigger midway along its shining length. He snatched at it just as discovery came. They were turning, when he fired—twice, thrice. The soundless discharge took them point blank and they collapsed into a state of mindless inertia. For how long? He did not know.

He was more concerned to know the whereabouts of the fourth guard, the one whose gun he held. The open door suggested that the elemental had left his comrades to inspect or service some kind of machinery.

He stepped quickly inside. Evidently for greater security, bolts were fitted on either side of the door. He shot them fast and turned to look about him.

He was confronted by an enormous instrument panel, rising in tiers, polished and gleaming. At its center, floor level, was an arrangement resembling the console of an organ, its keyboard set in horizontal rows of colored discs. Over it bent an Elemental. The fourth guard! There was no evidence that this humanoid was armed. As he slowly turned, as if sensing another and hostile presence, his face showed dead-white and ageless, loose-lipped, eyes fixed in an expressionless stare.

He had picked up a bar of some kind of metal, and now he confronted the simian creature with desperate threat.

"Stop! I suppose an elemental can die, like any other form of life. Call for help . . . make a move of

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any sort . . . and, by God, you'll go wherever it is your sort of horror goes when it dies."

"Who are you?"

"Never mind, who I am. What's your name?"

"Jared."

"Okay. Do what I tell you, Jared, and you won't be hurt. I don't know how you communicate in this place, but don't try it. If I die, you go with me. Got it?"

"What do you want?"

"Tell me about this . . ." He pointed to the rows of discs. He saw that each bore an embossed hieroglyphic symbol. None of it made any sense. "What do these mean?"

Jared said nothing.

"You heard me. Look . . . I'm getting out of this place—see? And you're helping me. I'm not arguing. What are these discs?"

"Call signs for the other vibrations."

"Spheres?"

"Yes."

He waved a hand at the great instrument board.

"What's that? What does it do? Quick now . . ."

Hatred leaped from the sunken eyes, but was gone again.

"It's a mind-mirror. Whoever you are, you're a fool."

"Okay, I'm a fool. But I'm still alive. I can still deal with you, if I have to. A mind mirror. How does it work?"

"It tunes in other planes. That is, sometimes. It's out of order"

He thought: this won't do. I'm getting no place. Seven aeons! it's wearing fast. Any second they'll be coming for me . . . missing me . . .

He took Jared by the throat, shaking him. The touch nauseated him. No flesh, like his own. His fingers slipped on it, felt numb. But the elemental's eyes bulged at the pressure. He gasped: "I lied—yes. I'll tell you anything you want to know . . . I'll tell you, I say . . ."

He released him.

"Earth. Terra. You call it the First Sphere? What disc is for Terra?"

Jared touched one.

"If that's not the right one . . . if you're fooling me!"

"It's the right one. You press twice . . . then to the left. It's what we call First Plane Wave . . ."

"Sound?"

"I don't know what you mean. It carries the Terra vibrations. It sends mind pictures."

He thought: I'll have to chance it. It was a thought within a thought. His mind said: "You'd better be right." He spun Jared around and let his fist smash hard down on the hollow between the shoulder blades, and the elemental fell on the floor, momentarily paralyzed.

He found a sort of silver string and tied the elemental's limbs, and straightened up, panting. His hand went out to the Terra disc, but a thought checked him.

"I must make some sort of prep-

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aration. Hopeless, of course, but you never know. Seven aeons! I wonder how much of it I've got left. I'm.... changing, sort of."

He caught up the metal bar and drove it through the glass-like substance of the outerwall. It did not splinter as glass splinters. It ripped like a cloth, Something flowed in. Maybe it was Elemental air.

His body, it seemed, was becoming heavier every moment . . . getting more substance into it. He couldn't see very well.

He found the Terra disc again. He pressed twice down, then to the left.

He began to shout—not now with his mind, but with his lungs.

"Terra! Terra! Can you hear me, Terra?"

Professor Graut knew what he had to do, for his part, and gave all his immediate attention to it.

"Sidbee . . . We know where he is . . . Chris Sommers. No, never mind about that. Tell Challenge Queen to alert. No, we don't know yet. We can only hope. No, she's too far out to show clearly on the screen here . . . tell Air Vice Marshall Benhurion to report progress, if any, direct on the beam. We'll pick it up on the inter-com . . . I've opened the switch. You've given Benhurion the story? Good. Tell him to launch his minnows as soon as you flash him."

Dr. Walstab had joined Jaguers at the cosmar screen. He was talking, eyes burning with urgency.

"Can you hear me, Sommers? Now, listen . . . your vibrations are automatically lowering themselves, but you've got somehow to help them. Can you get over to the window . . . the space you burst in the wall? Good. Do that. Lie flat. Breathe as slowly as you can. Keep drawing in your diaphragm and then releasing it. That will help to slow up your heart and lower the vibrations. Stop thinking. Do that, and leave the rest to us."

They had to strain their ears to catch that faint reply.

"I'll . . . do that. I think . . . coming after me . . . seems like something's rousing . . ."

"Chris!" Jaguers shouted.

Ace Peters said: "He's gone." He looked like a man in a dream.

"Well," Dr. Walstab said, in an exhausted voice, "we've done all that it's possible to do. Now we can only wait. Whatever comes will be in seconds . . . Wait . . ."

Report from Challenge Queen was coming in. They listened greedily.

"Have checked our position with that of Vibrant and correct within one point of arc. Ether clear. Very little star swell. Ship now hovering with launching flaps down. Nothing sighted."

They waited.

"Port visual reports slight disturbance approximately east and below . . . Flash received. Am launching two minnows . . . Something seems to be breaking ether

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surface . . . Both minnows breaking for dive . . ."

Jaguers muttered, in an agony of impatience: "Go on . . . go on. What's holding them?"

It came with a rush.

"Head and one arm sighted . . . minnows have spotted and are racing for place . . . trunk now in view . . . it's a man all right . . . not clear yet . . . yes, it's Sommers . . . someone here recognizes . . . tossed right up now as if released from an ether packet . . . leading minnow has reached him . . . they've got him . . . hold on! . . . something's breaking just to the right of them . . . it's the nose of a big ship . . . the minnows are turning . . . no, it's not a ship, it's like a big wheel spinning on its flat . . . it seems to be trying to push through something . . ."

The voice broke away. It came again; but faintly, as if the speaker's head was turned aside: "The thing's attacking. Can't see anything, but both minnows seem to be flung up as if something exploded under them. Turret Z. has sent a tracer . . . just missed . . . They've got the range . . . Come on, minnows, come ON. The wheel's gone. I don't know if we hit it, but it's gone. But the ether is all tossing, and there's a queer kind of hum, as if something I can't see was passing us . . . We're landing the minnows; yes, it's Sommers all right. He doesn't seem alive though . . . everything ripped off him . . ."

The voice halted again. They heard. "Yes, sir . . . Well, thank God for that, sir . . ."

A new voice spoke; the calm, precise tones contrasting with the previous speaker's excitement.

"E.S.P. Seven. Benhurion speaking. Is that you, Graut? Come through all right?"

"Yes, yes." Graut could hardly speak. He was thinking: These Service Chiefs! They don't seem to have any emotions at all. I daresay it's just as well, though. He cleared his throat and said: "It's true then? Is he . . . all right?"

"Out to it, but not in too bad shape, I'd say. The doctors are working on him now. Came in naked as the day he was born . . . Look here, Graut, I've only got half the story . . . Eh! Oh, well, I'll just have to wait then, I suppose. We'll be sending Sommers in on one of the flotilla ships. Yes, about a week, I'd say. Hear the static starting up?"

Ben Jaguers sat with his head on his crossed arms. His shoulders were heaving.

Dr. Walstab rose quietly and stood in front of the now featureless screen. "There are more things . . . Lord!"

Almost automatically, he moved the Odour Switch.

And suddenly the light on the cosmar screen grew tender. A sweet breath as of flowers crept into their nostrils, and all sound was folded like the passing of an angel host. It was so still, they could hear the clamor of their own hearts.

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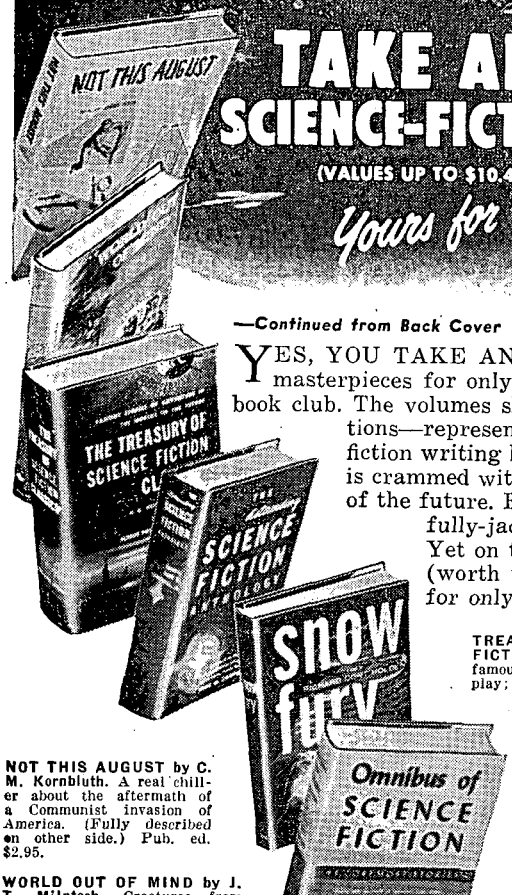

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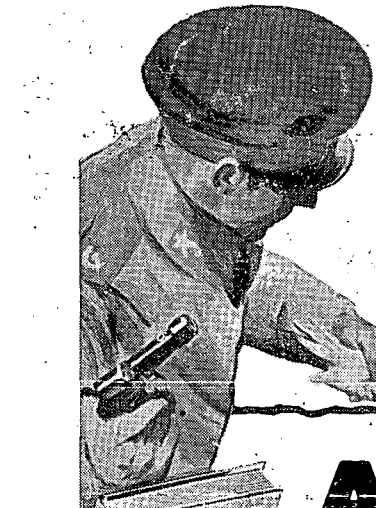

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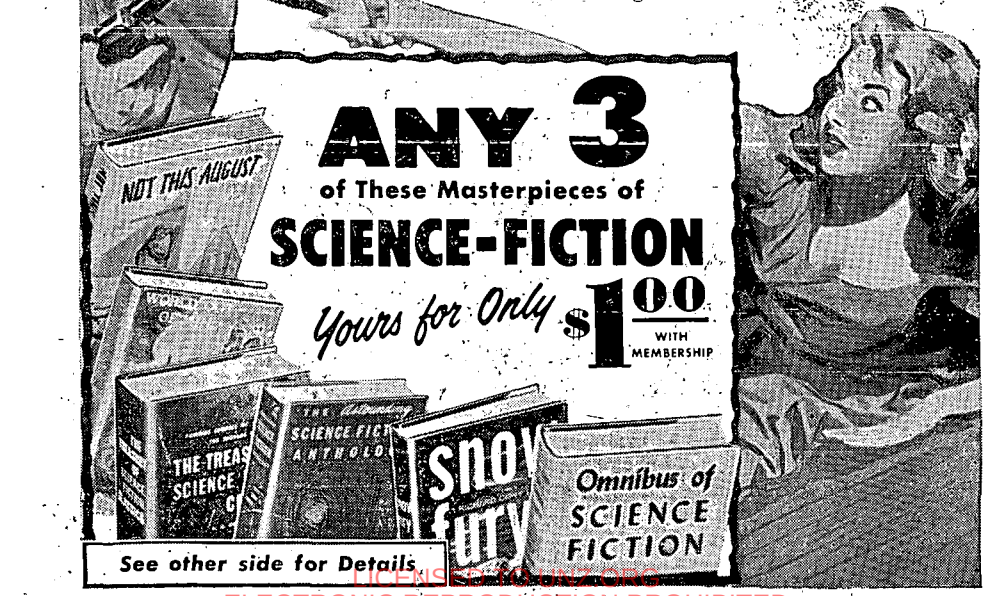

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